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ABSTRACT

In this theme issue of The "OSSC Bulletin" educators speak out about what they think their schools are doing right. The project goal was to select schools with varied socioeconomic backgrounds from different parts of the state, as well as to include at least one rural school and one innercity school. The two elementary schools, two middle schools, and four high schools selected have a reputation for doing a number of things right. In most cases, telephone interviews were conducted with one administrator and one teacher from each school. The schools are organized into three categories: (1) schools that appear to be consistently "good"; (2) "turnaround" schools; and (3) schools that have experienced a change in circumstances. In addition to a profile on each school, chapters are organized into categories based on administrators' and teachers' responses. A sidebar is provided for each school, giving an overview of socioeconomic background, location, unique characteristics, and other information. The conclusion briefly describes the successful elements that these schools have in common including leadership, parent involvement, and social services. Appended are the names and school affiliation of the 22 persons interviewed. (MLF)

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EIGHT JEWELS

Examples of Schools That Succeed as Told by the Educators Who Work in Them

Lynn Balster Liontos

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Preface

Today, talk about what schools are not doing right is plentiful. Criticism of the shortcomings of educators flows freely. Although we should not turn a deaf ear to those enumerating the problems plaguing our educational system, on balance, it is important to catch a glimpse of what schools are doing right. In this OSSC Bulletin, author Lynn Balster Liontos gives readers a detailed look at what eight Oregon schools—two elementary, two middle, and four high schools—are doing right.

The schools featured in this Bulletin can be classified into three groups: schools that have had a long reputation of being consistently "good"; "turnaround" schools (those that have made dramatic progress in the midst of numerous obstacles); and schools that are coping effectively with a change of circumstances, such as a merger or a significant increase in minority students or homeless students. The extensive interviews Liontos conducted with personnel at each of the schools provide the "meat" of the Bulletin. Comments made by administrators and teachers at the selected schools give readers an insightful, and often inspirational, inside look at how educators are trying to meet the diverse needs of students.

Liontos, a resident of Eugene, is a research analyst and writer who has written several reports and articles on a range of topics, including family involvement in education, at-risk youth, and school/social service cooperation.

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Introduction

In a recent remark about the perception of the failure of American schools to educate, Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California, said: "Seldom in the course of policymaking in the U.S. have so many firm convictions held by so many been based on so little convincing proof" (Gerald W. Bracey 1992).

The media seems to have convinced many people that schools aren't doing a good enough job, that they need overhauling. Business leaders often concur, saying that schools aren't turning out graduates with the skills necessary to produce an American work force that is able to compete in the global marketplace. Educators themselves are divided about the issue. One camp, the revisionists, generally think that school reformers in America have overstated the magnitude of the problem with schools. In response, the revisionists have launched a counterattack. They assert that schools are *not* in desperate shape. In fact, they maintain that student performance is clearly on the upswing.

Goals of This Bulletin

Do the revisionists' claims have validity? Or, are schools as bad as most reformers believe them to be? This Bulletin examines the other side of the issue: schools that work and that demonstrate success.

In this Bulletin, educators speak out about what they think their schools are doing right. It is not a scientific study, but a close look at eight schools in Oregon—two elementary schools, two middle schools, and four high schools—that have a reputation for doing a number of things right.

It is important to mention that this is not a study of school leadership, though this subject surfaces repeatedly on these pages. Acknowledging the importance of leadership, the conclusion details how it has contributed to the success of these eight schools.

In addition to a profile on each school, chapters are organized into categories based on administrators' and teachers' responses to this question: "What do you think your school is doing right?" A sidebar is provided for each school, giving the reader a quick overview of socioeconomic background, location, unique characteristics, and other information. The conclusion briefly describes the successful elements that these schools—which vary in size, socioeconomic background, history, and approaches—have in common.

Methodology and School Selection

This project began with the author calling schools in the Eugene area and asking administrators what they thought their schools were doing right in order to determine the kinds of material the Bulletin might generate.

The goal was to select elementary, middle, and high schools with varied socioeconomic backgrounds from different parts of the state, as well as to include at least one rural school and one innercity school.

In a few cases, schools were chosen by word of mouth. I am indebted to Dan Barker, superintendent of Crow-Applegate-Lorane School District, whose Oregon Statewide Assessment test scores were extremely high, for telling me about three other small rural schools in the state he thought were also "doing things right."

Other schools were chosen based on the recommendation of heads of curriculum departments in various school districts. These people were invaluable in recommending schools in their district that might meet my criteria and goals, as well as identifying the best person to talk to (usually the principal). All the interviews were done by telephone.

My original objective was to interview one administrator and two teachers or staff members from each school, but this proved to be impractical. In most cases, interviews consisted of one administrator and one teacher from each school. Additional information on school statistics, grant proposals, and school programs was sent to me by several of the administrators.

Organization

The schools are organized into three categories: (1) schools that appear to be consistently "good"; (2) "turnaround" schools that, due to some alteration (usually in leadership), have made dramatic changes; and (3) schools that have experienced a change in circumstances such as a merger or a recent influx of minorities and homeless students.

Each administrator and teacher interviewed gave willingly of their time and energy at an especially busy period in the year, and I thank every one of them for their insightful comments and information. Unfortunately, the limitation on document length prohibit including all of them in this Bulletin.

As a result of writing this Bulletin, I have a new appreciation for what schools are doing today in the face of often immense obstacles and a profound respect for the dedication, commitment, and caring of every person interviewed. I hope these educators' efforts in trying to meet the diverse needs of today's students—and the creative solutions they have come up with—will both inspire and be of practical help to the reader.

Chapter 1

Consistently Good Schools

Ashland High School
An Extracurricular Education—Ashland, Oregon

Ashland High School is located in what is perhaps one of the most unique small communities in Oregon. This tourist town of 17,000 is home to the nationally known Shakespearean Festival and Southern Oregon State College. The town draws new inhabitants who generally want to improve the quality of their life and who have an appreciation for education, claims John Tredway, cochair of the Social Science Department at the high school.

The diversity of the community contributes to its uniqueness. Although 98 percent Caucasian, Ashland's students come from homes where the parents may be farmers, entrepreneurs, artisans, writers, and professionals. The school ranked 220 out of 229 schools on the socioeconomic scale in the Oregon Assessment Test, so its population is definitely above average socioeconomically and generally fairly well educated.

Yet the high school has what Jim Bergene, recently retired principal, refers to as "flow through" students. These are often at-risk students sent to Ashland to live with a relative or acquaintance so that the student can become part of a good community and a good school. It is interesting, said Bergene, that of those students who dropped out during the 1989-90 school year (5.9 percent of the total student body), 50 percent had lived in the school district less than a year.

In addition, Bergene said he gets "a tremendous number of requests from foreign students who want to come to Ashland." Most of these requests Bergene has had to turn down. The school maintains two foreign exchange

programs that serve eight or nine foreign students out of a student population of 1,000. Also, Tredway said he has heard of people who moved to the area specifically because they wanted to get their son or daughter into an extracurricular activity that the school excels at, such as speech and debate.

Academic Successes

Ashland High School

High School: Grades 9-12

Location: Unique, small community of 17,000 in southern Oregon; home of Shakespeare Festival and Southern Oregon State College.

Student Body Size: 1,050

Staff Size: 93 (66 certified teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Above average, with adults in diverse occupations and a fairly well educated general population; 98 percent Caucasian.

Free and Reduced Lunch: No regular lunch program.

Unique Characteristics: High community support; range of extracurricular activities (with outstanding success in speech and debate, football, and marketing); strong program in the arts and humanities; outstanding foreign language program; alternative school on campus; collaboration with over 100 businesses in work/study programs.

Academic Achievement: One of the top two or three schools in the state on Oregon Assessment Test; SAT verbal scores last year—28 points above state norm and 45 points above national mean; SAT math scores 2 points above Oregon mean and 11 points above national (70 percent of seniors take the SAT test). All students taking advanced placement English, economics, and U.S. history tests scored 3 or higher on a scale of 5 (21 of 24 students taking U.S. history test scored either 4 or 5).

Awards: Commendations from Northwest Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges for outstanding activities program (athletics and nonathletics), for the number of students taking foreign languages, and for outstanding opportunities for students in work/study programs.

Dropout Rate: 5.9 percent for 1989-90

College Bound: Varies with each class from 55 to a little over 70 percent.

"I think Ashland High School is recognized as probably one of the more successful schools in the state," said Bergene. "Our test scores—our SAT scores—are always good." Indeed, he points out an interesting fact: 70 percent of Ashland High School seniors take the SAT test, whereas the state norm is 54 percent and the national norm only 42 percent. "Even so," states Bergene, "verbal scores last year were twenty-eight points above the state norm and forty-five points above the national mean." In math, Ashland's scores were two points above the Oregon mean and eleven points above the national. "If we'd had only the top 54 percent of our kids taking the test, our mean scores would have been much higher," Bergene said.

On the Oregon Assessment Test the school also did well. "I know we were listed as one of the top two or three schools in the state on this test by *The Oregonian*," said Bergene.

Their 1992 Advanced Placement scores (rated from one to five) were also very good, added Bergene. For example, in U.S. history all twenty-four students taking the test scored three or better (and twenty-one out of the twenty-four scored either four or five). In economics, 81 percent

of the students scored three or higher, and, in English, 100 percent received at least a score of three.

The school also has a strong foreign language program. Over 55 percent of the students take a foreign language, and because of their outstanding program, the Oregon Department of Education assigned a Japanese teacher to Ashland for one and a half years.

Extracurricular Activities

High test scores and an especially strong program in the arts and humanities are but two of the aspects that contribute to Ashland High School's good reputation. The school also excels in several extracurricular activities, especially football, speech and debate, and marketing. Even though the school is sixty-eighth in size out of the seventy-four AAAA schools, the football team has won state championships two out of the last three years. "Our school has won more football games than any other school in Oregon over the last five years," added Bergene.

Ashland's speech and debate teams have also won championships three years in a row. Additionally, they have a highly successful marketing department and their DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) is one of the top chapters in the nation, according to Tredway. At the state competition this past year, twenty-two of the forty spots available to Oregon for the national convention were filled by students from Ashland, said Bergene.

"We've got a lot of what we call 'singleton' elective classes that kids take advantage of," said Tredway. These classes, such as drama, music, and orchestra, are offered one period a day. He noted that "it gives the kids something more than just the state-mandated curriculum."

A School within a School

For students who, for various reasons, can't make it through the standard curriculum schedule, the high school offers ACE, an alternative school located on campus. This school-within-a-school was established in 1991-92. Betsy Bishop, English teacher and work experience coordinator, said that the program is very successful. Two teachers work with approximately twenty-six students, and the students design the program. The group meets in the morning to share goals and problems. Because everyone stays in the same group, it seems like a family. "It is perfect for many students who can't make it through the seven-day period with seven different teachers," said Bishop.

An Emphasis on Work/Study Programs

Bishop also coordinates one of the work/study programs for at-risk students. "A lot of people have work experience programs, but we really try to personalize ours," she said. The school holds a large awards banquet at the end of the year to recognize students who have worked thirty or forty hours a week.

Students earn credit for job experiences. "They're learning some skills at their job," adds Bishop, "and we recognize that it's a positive educational experience if they do good work." Bishop cited one student who was a volunteer fireman and put in 300 hours with the paramedics and fire department. She also emphasized the school's strong collaborative relationship with Ashland businesses. "Each year we probably work with over 100 businesses right here in Ashland," she said.

The school has received commendations from the Northwest Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges for its outstanding opportunities in work/study programs and the increased number of students who have become involved in the programs.

Team Effort Pays Off

To what do the principal and teachers attribute Ashland's success? Tredway, whose twenty years at the school give him considerable insight, summed it up by saying, "It's a team effort." Bergene, Bishop, and Tredway all emphasize ongoing support of the community for the schools. "I think there's a definite correlation between strong community support and the final end result, and the community wants good schools," said Tredway. "This is a school district [whose residents have] supported every tax measure, every property tax base, during the years when that was possible to do—every one of them. I believe that it's probably the only school district in the Pacific Northwest [where this has occurred]." Obviously, the community has confidence in the way Ashland School District manages its money.

Tredway points out that support comes not only from the community, but also from the school district and school board. "I think we have people working together and by that I mean parents, staff, students, and administration all trying to help each other," he said.

As an example, he recounted the first time the school speech team won the state championship three years ago. The athletic director called Tredway, who is also the speech and debate coach, and asked him if he wanted to put up a state championship banner in the gym. "You don't see that at other schools," Tredway explained. "Rather there's usually a barrier between athletics and academics. Here you have football players saying 'good luck' to

the debate kids going to state and vice versa. It creates a morale in the school that focuses on achievement and people supporting each other."

While citing the dedication of the staff, Tredway also points to the administrators "who let teachers teach" and serve as facilitators of teacher success. "Those are rare things," reiterated Tredway. "I talk to colleagues around the state who have all kinds of roadblocks in the way of being successful just because they have barriers at the administrative level. We tend to have people who support us, and that's what makes it work."

Student Input

Bishop also thinks Ashland High School is doing the right thing in attempting to be more collaborative. The school really wants input, she said, not only from teachers but also from students and the community.

As an example, she talked about the process the school went through this year to hire a new principal and assistant principal (Bergene is retiring). Not only did community members serve on the committees that interviewed candidates, but forty to fifty students interviewed the top three choices. Students said, "We want to be able to talk to our future principal and assistant principal." Thus a forum was set up where the candidates fielded questions from students without the teachers present. "I've never seen students want to be so involved in everything," said Bishop. She added that the district curriculum director said she was never so proud of Ashland High School as she was when he heard the quality of the questions asked by the students.

Dedicated Leadership and Staff

Another thing that Ashland High School is doing right is providing quality leadership in the classroom and at the administrative level. Said Bishop,

> The administrators have a common goal of working together, and they care about the happiness of the students. They're always interested in the development of every single child. I think most school districts would say that they are, but I notice that these people really are committed—they put a lot of time in.

She compared Ashland with a suburban southern California school where she previously taught. In her former school, teachers couldn't wait until the seventh period when they were out the door and into their car. However, at Ashland, it is not unusual to see all the cars still there at 4:15 p.m. Bishop also mentioned that when candidates for the principal's position asked students what they liked about Ashland High School, the students

responded that the teachers cared and were available when students needed help with problems.

Bergene said that while the high school is in many ways fairly traditional, teachers attend workshops to stay current with new methodology. Tredway added, "When it comes right down to it, it's the classroom teacher who motivates the kids. And I think we've got a really dedicated staff here."

Seeing the Big Picture in Education

Bishop is convinced that the school is doing something right by encouraging extracurricular activities. Bergene has been largely responsible for this encouragement since students have to be released to travel to competitions. "Jim is so supportive of letting students participate," Bishop said. "He sees the big educational picture, and he says that these experiences are educational too." That's what she thinks is so wonderful—that Ashland High School is attempting to educate "the whole person" and endow students with vision so they are better prepared for the future. Bergene believes the school's expectations help:

> We're the premier school in several major areas of student endeavors, such as speech and debate, and that's important for kids. They know they're going to a good school. Kids come in and complain that we're much tougher than other schools. It isn't so much that we're tougher, but that we expect more.

Finally, Bishop points to the school's focus on positive reinforcement as a reason the campus atmosphere is so "huggable." She believes that building up the self-esteem of students may be a big contributor. "Because the students like themselves, we have less discipline problems here," she added. Students really seem to care about their friends. There isn't divisiveness between groups of students. Part of this, she speculated, is due to the fact that students have known each other a long time in a small town atmosphere.

The staff at Ashland High School is not content to just sit on their laurels. "We look at things we can do better," said Bergene. "Sometimes we're frustrated because we can't do them better or don't know how. So we're searching for ways to do things more effectively." Tredway, when asked if Ashland High School had consistently been a good school during his twenty years there, said yes with no hesitation. "We aspire to being great," he said, "but we realize that's more a goal than something we've already achieved. We've got a lot of challenges ahead of us, too."

Sherman Union High School
The Personal Touch—Moro, Oregon

Sherman Union High School is located in the little town of Moro (population 300). The high school is the focus of Sherman County, an agricultural region of eastern Oregon containing wheat farms and cattle ranches. The county population is less than 2,000 and is declining as small farms fall prey to larger, wealthier ones.

County Identity and Support

Sherman County benefits from strong community support and identity. Rick Eggers, superintendent and principal, said it is the only place where he's lived that people answer "Sherman County" when asked where they're from rather than identifying their particular town. The county identity extends to the high school, which is sometimes referred to as Sherman County High School.

The county lacks a major metropolitan area and a major retail center. Students often have to travel thirty miles to get to school. "The whole county is kind of in the middle of nowhere," said Eggers. In view of this, it's no surprise that the centrally located high school is the center of the county's social and educational life.

This past year, Sherman High School was struck by a fire that damaged much of the building. As a consequence, students had to travel to The Dalles for schooling (often an extra forty miles) for four months. During this time someone came up to Eggers and said, "There's a big hole in this county because the school isn't there."

Historically, teachers and students have benefitted from the community's extremely strong support of education and the school. The community has shown its commitment to the school by its responsiveness to teachers' requests for conferences or other staff development opportunities and by raising scholarship money for students.

Students' Backgrounds

Gary Shelton, counselor and teacher at Sherman High School for seventeen years, places the students in the upper-middle economic class. However, Eggers and Shelton explained that the income shown from farming is often misleading since the assets aren't liquid.

Because of the nature of wheat farming, there is not a large migrant population and the county has few minorities. However, Eggers said the county has some poor families and that the school had several students who lived with friends this last year because they had no homes. "We have all the similar problems of a big school," he added. "We just don't have the large numbers."

The school is small—110 students this year, with approximately twenty-five students in each graduating class. The staff (ten full-time and two part-time teachers) usually have at least four preparations each, but the tradeoff is smaller classes (the average class size is twelve to fifteen).

Sherman Union High School

High School: Grades 9-12

Location: Small, rural school in eastern Oregon town of Moro (population 300). Serves all of Sherman County (population less than 2,000). No major metropolitan area or retail center in the county.

Student Body Size: 110 (graduates approximately 25 students per year)

Staff Size: 20 (12 certified teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Primarily agricultural (wheat farming and cattle ranching). Mostly upper-middle class. Not a large migrant population; very few minorities.

Free and Reduced Lunch: 16.8 percent (19 students) for 1991-92

Unique Characteristics: Strong community support for schools—high school is focus of the community; small class sizes (averages 12-15 students); communication with parents a top priority (students don't slip through the cracks); teachers are extremely accessible; exceptional athletics; scholarship money raised by community for students going on to college.

Academic Achievement: Ranked seventh in state in reading on Oregon Statewide Assessment Test; over 50 percent of juniors take PSATs, with both verbal and math scores above Oregon average; SAT test scores are 30-40 points above Oregon average on verbal section, 20-30 points above average on math section.

Dropout Rate: 1988-89—one student out of 104; 1989-90—two students out of 117; 1990-91—four students out of 121; 1991-92—four students out of 119.

College Bound: In 1991-92, 74 percent going on to college; on the average, 60-75 percent go on to college.

Learning Opportunities

The school's instructional program is basically traditional. However, a TAG (talented and gifted) program was recently started, an advanced placement history course was offered for the first time last year, and this year a distance learning program will be in effect.

The fire can be looked on as a blessing, said Eggers, since each classroom was wired for television during the renovation. "We're excited about it," said Eggers. "I think distance learning is the way of the future for small schools. It just opens up the curriculum gigantically." This year, Sherman offers an advanced placement calculus class and will be doing more staff inservice via satellite.

Discipline and Trust Are Assets

This is a high school where severe discipline problems are rare and where students have such pride in

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their school that vandalism or graffiti are virtually nonexistent. Shelton said that when grade school children start roughhousing, instead of waiting for a teacher, high school students tell the kids, "Not in here. Don't mess it up. Go outside." Thus, a respect for the facility is passed on to younger children.

Sherman's library uses an honor system whereby students check out their own books. The school also has a dress code for athletic trips or field events that students readily accept. "When they get off the bus," said Shelton, "students feel good about themselves. I think our community expects our young people to act respectfully, and the students come up to that standard."

Academic Successes

Sherman's students measure up very well academically. Shelton pointed out that over 50 percent of juniors take the PSAT test, which is above the norm, and about the same percentage take the SAT. On the PSAT test, Sherman is about three points above the Oregon average on the verbal and math sections. Sherman's SAT scores are about thirty to forty points above the Oregon average on the verbal section and about twenty to thirty points above the Oregon average on the math section.

On the Oregon Assessment Test last year, Sherman High School ranked seventh in the state in reading. Sherman was also above the state average in the other four assessment areas. Why does this small school rank so high in reading, only three points below the top scorer (Sprague High School in Salem)? The reasons are difficult to identify. Shelton believes contributing factors are the good job the grade schools obviously do, the wide selection of books in Sherman's library—some students, he said, read over 100 books a year—and a "silent reading" program the school used several years ago where students were required to read for a twenty-minute period each day.

College-Bound Students

The high percentage of students who go on to college and the number of scholarships available indicate that the staff of the high school is doing something right. The scholarship money comes from local people who, over the years, have built up endowments and trusts, and continue to hold fundraisers.

Last year twenty of the school's twenty-seven graduates (74 percent) are college bound. On the average, says Shelton, 60 to 75 percent of Sherman's graduates attend college. "There's not a lot else for them to do here in Sherman County," he explained. Eggers added that there are not

twenty-five new jobs available each year in Sherman County. "So, these kids who are graduating are going to have to go elsewhere," he said. "Thus, there's a great emphasis on preparing the kids for Oregon, for the nation, for the world—for whatever is out there—so they can have a productive life outside this small, rural area."

In the last seven years, the high school scholarship committee has awarded in excess of $391,000 for scholarships. This year, $34,000 was awarded to a dozen 1992 graduates in addition to a large number of past graduates who are currently enrolled in college. In 1988-89, the committee gave out $72,000 in scholarship money. In the past eight years, 63 percent of Sherman's high school graduates have received financial aid for post-high school education.

"What this indicates to me," said Eggers, "is that this community understands the importance of education. It also communicates to me that the community must have confidence in our high school. They wouldn't be investing this kind of money if our kids weren't able to make it in college."

Sherman's Personal Touch

Eggers thinks another factor that makes Sherman unique is the school's size. "Because of our small size, kids don't fall through the cracks and we can give a personal touch," Eggers said. As an example, one of their goals this past year was to make sure that at the end of the year everyone in the senior class had enough credits to graduate.

Shelton points out other examples of the personal touch: (1) the school's staff members communicate with their constituents—good communication with parents is their highest priority; (2) the school involves the whole community ("they know it's their school"); and (3) the teachers are available and accessible.

If students are slipping, Shelton said, "all we have to do is get on the phone and ask mom or dad to come in for a conference." Because of parents' willingness to confer with teachers, students know their parents are aware of their academic progress and that improvement is expected. Teachers also send progress reports to parents every three weeks and immediately notify them should students' progress begin to slide.

Accessibility of Teachers

Sherman High School teachers are extremely accessible. In a larger school, a student probably never would think of phoning his or her teacher about an assignment. But here, said Shelton, teachers get calls at home almost every night. If the student doesn't call, the parent who is helping with

the homework often does. Shelton attributes this to the school's size. On a heavy night, he may get three or four calls but usually it's one or two per evening.

The community's small size is another factor affecting accessibility to teachers. Teachers run into parents on the street, at the grocery store, or at a ball game. "We're going to meet them again and again so there's not the anonymity that you can find in a larger [community]," said Shelton. "Teachers here will take the time in the grocery store to say to the parent, 'Boy, I'd sure like you to come in—can we make an arrangement?' Or 'Can I meet you at your house?'" Eggers said,

> Here, you are the teacher wherever you go. Everybody knows who you are, and people expect you to be accessible. Our teachers don't mind that. If they did, they wouldn't be here. I think it takes a special person to do that.

Communication works both ways. Community members are not afraid to call and find out what is going on or ask a question, said Shelton. "They're also not afraid to write a thank you to a teacher expressing their appreciation for you helping their son or daughter or just being available. Each time you get one of those, you just kind of continue on," he added.

Outstanding Athletics

The school has an exceptional athletic program. Within the last four years, Sherman's athletes have been state football and state basketball champions. Last year, the boys' football team made it to the state finals. In 1991, the baseball team advanced to the state semifinals. The girls' basketball team advanced to the state tournament last year. Also, at the state basketball tournament Sherman's band won "best band at the tournament," which Eggers said was not unusual.

Eggers is intimately acquainted with athletics because he is not only principal and superintendent at Sherman, but also the parent of two recent Sherman High School graduates, both of whom were accepted by a major university and received scholarships from Sherman. "As a parent I feel very good about this school," Eggers said. "That's why I applied for this position. Because this wasn't just a job—this was a place that I thought was doing really good work."

Staff Attrition

Shelton told a story about a group of eight teachers who were hired at the same time about seventeen years ago. About five years later, five of these

teachers left. Shelton kept in contact, sometimes getting together with them during the summer or stopping to visit whenever he passed through their new locations. He said they all would say, "You know, if I had it to do over again, I wouldn't have moved." When asked why, they would respond, "Because you don't have the relationships with the kids, the rapport with the parents that you have at Sherman." They also talked about the frustrating bureaucracy at their larger schools. Each time he heard this, Shelton would say, "Well, maybe I'll stay a little longer."

Shelton is happy with his long tenure at Sherman. He said words can't express the joy of watching students through the years and being able to see them again after they graduate and know them right away by name. Shelton thinks the rest of the staff feels the same way. "A number of teachers have been here probably seven or eight years now," he explained. "And the ones that left, if they could get back in now, they would."

Monroe Middle School
Home of the Spanish Immersion Program—Eugene, Oregon

Monroe middle school is distinguished by a unique mix of programs, socioeconomic stability, a motivated student population, and local and national recognition for academic excellence.

A Unique Program

The Spanish Immersion Program at Monroe Middle School is unique on the West Coast and is one of only a few in the nation. Out of Monroe's 630 students, 100 participate in the program, which spans first through twelfth grades. Other immersion programs on the West Coast stop at grade 6, said Lynne George, principal at Monroe for the last four years. "It takes an extra amount of dedication and work to keep together a program that is different from the mainstream," she added.

The program's success is evident. Only occasionally does a student withdraw from the program. The pioneer group that began in grade 1 is now in grade 10. Students in the program are taught in Spanish exclusively for 45 percent of the school day, mainly in language arts and social studies. Students speak only Spanish in these classes, and all their instructional materials are in Spanish.

Program Goals

One of the program goals is fluency in the language. Another goal is to develop a global perspective and teach students to appreciate other cultures. Students in Monroe's immersion program have outscored hundreds of high school students on the National Spanish Exam, which is usually taken by high school students who have studied Spanish three years. It is predicted that Monroe's immersion students will likely set new records on state and other Spanish tests in the future. Students in the Monroe program have also received national recognition.

Monroe Middle School

Middle School: Grades 6-8

Location: Eugene, Oregon (population 117,000).

Student Body Size: 630

Staff Size: 49 (35 certified teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Middle/upper-middle class area with academically oriented parents/professionals. Recent influx of minorities (from 3 percent four years ago to 12 percent today; fairly even mixture of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native-Americans).

Unique Characteristics: Spanish Immersion Program unique on West Coast; at-risk programs (support groups, teacher mentors, at-risk camp, grade-level meetings on referrals); multicultural program for whole year in seventh grade; positive recognition programs; responsive to community needs—parental support for school.

Academic Achievement: Average of 51 percent of students on honor roll; 500 recognition referrals in 1991-92; Oregon State Assessment Test scores at or above proficiency level in all areas (reading—95 percent; math—86 percent; literature—92 percent; listening skills—98 percent; study skills—86 percent).

Awards: Presidential Award for School Excellence (1984); Foreign Language Instruction Award (1990); Principal Award from Northwest Women in Education for striving for equality in sex, race, and social class; All-Star Academic Teams (1990); several state and national teacher awards; Associated Oregon Industries award for high student performance in academics and activities (1992); one of five sites in nation chosen for Geraldine Dodge Foundation grant for teacher inservice program at University of North Carolina on adolescent development and learning (1992).

Attendance: 93-94 percent between 1988 and 1991

Peer Pressure

It's important in middle school to be accepted by your peers, said George—to be in "the group." "So, the 100 students in Spanish really do have a vulnerability to being different," she explained, "and that's tough on young people's developing identity. But, we've convinced people that it's worth what they have to give up."

Martha Robert, a sixth-grade teacher, said she was surprised the program did not "tend to be elitist in the school." However, both George and former principal Jim Slemp made it clear that the immersion program was not going to pull staff away from the regular program of the school. "Actually, the parents wanted this, too," said Robert. "Parents wanted the immersion kids integrated into the regular program. They didn't want the Spanish immersion kids to stay together all day long. So, I think both of those things have created a healthy environment for the school."

Student Academic Performance

In addition to the students in the Spanish Immersion Program, Monroe's student body, as a whole, performs well academically. An average of 51 percent of the students are on the honor roll. Robert said that the norm at Monroe is to get good grades. She feels it's a "kid norm" nurtured by the parents in the community. "So, what happens when we get a student from another part of town who hasn't been doing well," she said, "is that after she's been here for awhile—it usually takes about a year—the student, in order to be normative, will tend to conform to the 'kid norm'."

Monroe students do well on state tests. For instance, in the Oregon Statewide Assessment Test, Monroe students were at or above the proficiency levels in all five areas (see sidebar on previous page).

Prolific Awards

The school and staff have won many awards and recognition. In 1984, Monroe received the Presidential Award for School Excellence from the U.S. Department of Education, ranking in the top five among all secondary schools in the country. In 1989, Sam Miller was recognized by *Learning Magazine* as one of the top twenty teachers in the U.S. Then in 1990, the school's Spanish Immersion Program was selected as an exemplary school in Oregon by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. In that same year, Monroe's All-Star Academic Teams took top honors in statewide competition. Students advanced to round two of the national competition comprised of 25,000 students from 1,600 schools. In 1991, Principal Lynne George received an award from the Northwest Women in Education Association for striving to achieve "equality in sex, race, and social class."

In May 1992, the school received an Associated Oregon Industries award for high student performance in academics and extracurricular activities. The school was cited for having an unusually high number of students on the honor roll and high participation in afterschool activities, particularly sports. In the summer of 1992, Monroe was selected by the Geraldine Dodge Foundation as one of five sites in the nation to participate in a teacher inservice program entitled "Schools Attuned" at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Multicultural Sensitivity

Multicultural sensitivity is an area that the school has tried to improve, and George's award is evidence of improvement. Monroe's socioeconomic status has historically been middle to upper-middle professional class. But in

the last three years, said George, the school has experienced an influx of children of color. When George arrived at the school four years ago, minorities comprised 3.5 percent of the student body. Now the figure is 12 percent. George said the minority population at the school is "a pretty even mixture of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native-Americans."

The school surveyed its students in spring 1990 to determine how they felt about themselves and the school. The survey contained questions such as, "Do you feel discriminated against?" It also asked about socioeconomic status, race, and handicaps. George said they found that a much larger portion of the students felt they were discriminated against on the basis of economic status rather than on the basis of color. "The kids are thinking about poor kids in a different way than they're thinking about kids of color," said Robert. She explained that discrimination occurred based on such things as the clothes students wore or how they acted. "It's our low-income students that we need to work on—getting them assimilated into the school," she said.

The school has an equity and racial policy. In addition to using surveys, the number of referrals or suspensions for racial and handicapped slurs will be monitored. Monroe also has a "kids of color" support group and a multicultural program (The Reach program) that was adopted by the school district. Most schools use this program for one term. However, Monroe students spend the entire seventh grade in the program.

Teachers of The Reach program begin by talking about Western and Eastern Europeans that immigrated to America; then they discuss African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Using books written by minorities, students read about those groups' histories in America. Then students do a project about their own cultural background.

"I think that program has done a lot," said Robert. "I used to teach seventh grade and I would get comments from kids as they went through this program, saying things like, 'I didn't realize we had done this many things wrong to people.' The program heightens their sensitivity." She added that the experience also makes students aware that they are members of a culture, so that the question isn't only "Who are these people?" but also "Who am I?"

At-Risk Programs Provide Extra Help

George believes that just being a middle school student—the age—puts a student at risk. "At this age they're developing identities," she said, "so we regard any kind of crisis as important. Every kid becomes at risk if they have a separation or loss, such as moving, divorce, or death in the family, illness, or a parent losing a job. Any of those things are critical to a kid's mental health, and, of course, when they're occupied thinking about those things, they don't concentrate on their schoolwork."

George said they use a survey to identify problem areas for improvement. An independent organization analyzes the survey responses and develops a profile of each student that has a problem with peers, adults, or with authority or responsibility. The school counselor then holds support meetings for those students with the greatest needs. In the past, George said they have had support groups for kids of color, students who are dealing with friendship issues, or those experiencing loss or divorce. The topics change as different problems surface.

The Discipline Program

The school also has "a structured discipline program," according to George, where students who misbehave are referred to grade-level teaching teams. Each grade-level team reviews these referrals once a week. In addition to discussing curriculum topics and students who are doing well, teachers review the discipline referrals and brainstorm about preventive or supportive strategies. Thus, individual teachers and classroom teachers as a group address students' problems and discuss ways to work with those who have difficulties.

Robert mentioned that a lot of attention is given to at-risk students. Before the school year starts, an at-risk camp is held, by invitation, for incoming sixth graders identified by elementary teachers as having organizational or behavioral problems. At the camp, people help these students get their notebooks organized and orient them to Monroe.

In addition, Robert said the school has a very talented teacher who teaches reading to at-risk students. "He always does computers in conjunction with reading," she said. "And these are kids who won't have computers in their homes and who need to be computer literate in order to function in society." Another teacher is starting a science class where at-risk students will be mentors for other students in the computer room. "It puts these kids in a prestigious leadership position," Robert added.

The school also offers academic assistance to those who need special help. An early morning Sunrise School—a supervised study hall—is held daily. Three days a week, teachers are also available for individual instruction during Early Morning Resource. Finally, a mentor program pairs students with teacher volunteers for students who require additional support.

Positive Recognition Programs

The other part of Monroe's discipline policy is to recognize students' positive behavior. Two of the most popular ways that George referred to are "recognition referrals" and "chance awards." When a student gets a recognition referral, he receives a certificate, and his name is announced over

the intercom. "On a daily basis we're reading the names of kids who've gotten recognition referrals," said George. "And we know it's working because every once in awhile a kid will turn in a teacher's name for recognition. That's really nice that the kids reciprocate by also giving teachers recognition." During the past year, 500 recognition awards were issued.

A chance award is much more immediate. When a teacher or administrator sees a student opening a door for someone, picking up a piece of paper, or saying "please" or "thank you," the student receives a ticket. The student then brings the ticket to the office and puts it in a jar. A couple of times a month, George pulls out seven names and takes those students to McDonald's for lunch.

As part of their positive recognition program, Monroe also takes students on trips at the end of the year. The sixth and seventh graders go to local parks. The eighth graders go on an overnight trip to Seattle where they take a ferry boat ride, go to a Mariners baseball game and the Seattle Science Center, and sleep overnight in a school gym. "The kids think the eighth-grade trip is the cat's meow," said George. However, to go on these trips students have to behave well throughout the year, so the trips are "kind of a carrot," George admits.

Communication with Parents

Robert said that teachers do a lot of communicating with families. "I feel that our client isn't just our student but also the parent, and that behavior and performance of students are much better if parents trust you," Robert said. She does a lot of things to get parents into the classroom ("This year I had ten parents volunteer to show slides in world geography," she commented). Robert contacts all parents in Block Classes at least once per year and some as many as six or seven times a year. School policy mandates that teachers must make contact with parents before referring students to the office.

Progress reports are sent to parents every three weeks and include comments about unsatisfactory or outstanding work. At six weeks, a formal report card is issued. Then the block teachers—those in language arts and social studies who have the students for two periods a day—confer with students about their report cards. Those same teachers also talk with students about any referrals, good or bad, that the students received. "Something doesn't just happen to a kid at Monroe and it's forgotten about," said Robert. "There's a lot of teacher contact and good counseling support people."

Responsiveness to the Community

Robert believes that one of the major elements in Monroe's success is high responsiveness to the community. For example, in the past, parent conferences were held with the homeroom guide teacher. But parents said, "It's really nice that you have us talk to the homeroom guide teacher, but they don't really know anything about the grades. We want to talk to the people who give these grades." Thus, this year, parents are able to choose the teachers with whom they want to confer.

Robert said she also thought the school was being responsive to the community by trying to keep current about educational reforms such as school restructuring and integrated curriculum. She explained that an integrated curriculum will probably better reflect the academically oriented community. For instance, literature and reading have always been taught as separate subjects by ability group. "We're not going to do that next year though," she said. "We're going to integrate those subjects into our language arts/social studies blocks. But we're also going to have an elective offering those kinds of classes because we're aware that our community really likes them."

Parent Support for the School

One parent, Pat Kessinger, wrote that one of Monroe's strengths is the effort that is made to integrate new parents and students into the school.

> We began receiving the parent newsletter while Andy was still in fifth grade. That spring Monroe held information nights and got Andy to visit the school. A teacher came to our home that summer to meet him and answer questions. At the family picnic on his first day of school, we sat with other families whose kids shared the same teacher and felt welcomed.

Monroe also holds parent-visit days during which parents experience their child's school schedule and learn about the school. In return, Robert said she receives wonderful support for the visits from parents. "I've maybe had—out of the nine years I've been here—two parents who have gotten angry with me. The rest have been very supportive, no matter what I call about," she said.

Top Notch Staff and Leadership

Robert also cited the staff and leadership as factors in the school's success. "The staff is a very bright group of people," she said. "Many have a

lot of national recognitions. We have very, very good teachers." She thinks Jim Slemp, the principal who began Monroe Middle School in 1983, along with the original teachers, were very visionary. In fact, she said, their vision was so advanced that when the Carnegie Commission Report on Middle Schools came out in 1989, Robert did a paper comparing Monroe with the commission's recommendations and found that Monroe was already doing 90 percent of what the report suggested. Robert added:

> Originally, I think that had to do with Jim's leadership. And then, what has happened is that there's been a stable base of people. And the teachers Lynne has brought in have complemented the original group. We've become very unified in terms of expectations, and they tend to be community expectations. So, I think that's why Monroe has maintained its excellence for so long—that it was just a superb structure.

There have also been new developments. "My job is to make sure that the school changes with the population," said George. "It's not the same curriculum as when I got here, but the standards are still high."

Chapter 2

Turnaround Schools

McKenzie High School
Distance Learning Pioneer—Finn Rock, Oregon

About forty-five miles upriver from the Eugene-Springfield area, McKenzie High School sits alongside the river that shares its name. About 70 to 75 percent of the people who live along the river are retired or have no children in school, said Russ Conklin, principal of the high school.

The school district stretches 30 miles or more and draws students from the small towns or villages of McKenzie Bridge, Vida, Finn Rock, and Nimrod. Only a handful of students live close enough to walk or ride their bikes to school; the rest are bussed in. Unlike the majority of river residents, McKenzie's students come from average or lower-income working-class homes with parents who are employed in wood products industries or tourism. The only other source of employment in the area is riverside restaurants and cafes.

The school is comprised of grades 7 through 12 and is a focus for students in the area. Conklin said there is nothing much around for youth to do. Thus, when Conklin became principal in 1982, he found many students coming to school simply for sports/social rather than academic reasons, which led to some disruptive occurrences. Although sports/social concerns continue to motivate the attendance of some McKenzie students, they are no longer disruptive.

Improvements in Discipline

Discipline was one of the first major areas that Conklin, with the

support of new Superintendent Ed Curtis, set out to improve after Conklin was hired. "When I first came here," he commented, "the students were wild. There was a lack of respect for staff and other students. The school was in a poor state of affairs in terms of discipline and learning."

Since substance abuse was a problem, Conklin implemented a tough policy on alcohol use. The first time a student is found possessing or using alcohol, the student is automatically expelled. The purpose of this is to get the student to a treatment center for evaluation. As soon as the evaluation is done, the student can come back to school. "That policy has really dramatically pushed the alcohol problem out of the school," said Conklin.

He also instituted an attendance policy. Absences in excess of twenty days a year mean that a student won't receive credit in each of his classes. During its first year, the attendance policy made a big difference—McKenzie had only two students absent more than twenty days. In subsequent years, the policy allowed absences beyond the twenty days to be made up hour for hour after school or on Saturdays. The policy worked well, improving the attendance rate to 95 percent.

McKenzie High School

Junior High and High School: Grades 7-12

Location: A rural school district stretching about 30 miles along the McKenzie River, 45 miles from Eugene-Springfield area. Students are bussed or drive to school from several small towns or villages.

Student Body Size: 210

Staff Size: 31 (18 certified teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Mostly working-class homes, average to lower income. Parents involved in forest industry or logging. No industry in area other than restaurants along the river.

Free and Reduced Lunch: 30 percent

Unique Characteristics: One of seven schools in Oregon to offer distance learning—provides five foreign language classes and numerous other classes; school within a school (junior high separated from senior high); improvements in discipline and structure (tough policies on substance abuse and attendance); focus on helping every student receive a high school diploma; excellent turnout for parent-teacher conferences; smallness an asset (keeping track of kids).

Academic Achievement: SAT scores went from an average total of 781 (Oregon average 901) in 1982-83 to 1,006 (Oregon average 927) in 1988-89; scores generally stay at 920 or better.

Awards: "Work Force 2000" grant (1992) to prepare students for transition from school to work; Department of Oregon Education grant (1992): "Community and School Training Students: A Structural Work Experience Pilot Program for Rural Schools."

Attendance: 95 percent

Dropout Rate: Varies from 2 to 6 percent

College Bound: 25 to 30 percent go on to college (scholarship fund being started for those who need assistance to attend college).

However, the Oregon Department of Education ruled that such policies are no longer legal, and the McKenzie High School attendance policy was dropped this year. "We have noticed our kids being absent a lot more since the policy went out," said Conklin. "It was really powerful." The staff at McKenzie are now searching for alternatives that would encourage student attendance.

Because of the tighter disciplinary structure, Conklin said that academic scores began to increase dramatically. For example, during Conklin's first year at McKenzie in 1982-83, average SAT scores were 395 for math and 386 for verbal, a combined average of 781. This was well below the state average total score of 901. In 1988-89, McKenzie's average SAT total rose to 1,006, compared to the state average of 927. Generally, he said, the students' average total has stayed around 920 or better.

Galen Scrivner, math teacher and coach, agreed that discipline has really improved since Conklin took over as principal. "As classroom teachers, the staff feels that if we have to discipline a student, Russ will stand behind us," he said. "It's also made it much easier to teach. We're able to spend more time with the educational process instead of dealing with disruptive students."

Low Dropout Rate

McKenzie High School has a low dropout rate that varies between 2 and 6 percent. "We're up in the woods so there's nothing much going but school," explained Conklin. "All we have to do is provide ways for kids to want to be here in terms of activities and sports programs. So we go out of our way to provide a lot of sports activities and the majority of our students are involved in them."

Between 25 to 30 percent of McKenzie's graduates head on to college. "Many of our kids don't have the money to go," said Conklin. However, the school is just beginning to fund an account to assist any student who wants to go to college to do so on a scholarship—at least that's the dream, said Conklin.

Distance Learning Program

Something that Scrivner definitely believes McKenzie High School is doing right is its Distance Learning Program, which began in fall 1989. The school is one of seven in Oregon offering this new technology and the second or third school in the state to implement it. The school has two satellite dishes and two providers; the first was initiated by a donation from Lane Electric Cooperative. Classes can be broadcast simultaneously to three separate classrooms in addition to other places such as the library and high school cafeteria, allowing for larger audiences.

Students talk by telephone with their teacher and other students throughout the Northwest during class time. Since all classes are recorded, students can check out the tapes and replay parts they missed or want to review.

The success of the program is partly due to Betsy Gabriel, the distance learning coordinator, said Scrivner. Gabriel actually took the classes along with the students when the program first started. She is always present in the classroom to supervise and help students both during class and for an hour after school.

Distance learning is especially useful for teaching foreign languages. There are very few high schools that offer five foreign languages, and McKenzie is proud to be one of them. In addition to Japanese, Spanish, French, Russian, and German, McKenzie also offers art history, advanced placement English literature, anatomy and physiology, and calculus—"anything that students want," said Conklin, "even if it's just one student at our school."

The program is growing in popularity. In the first year of its operation, seven students were enrolled. Currently, thirty students participate, and the numbers are expected to increase.

McKenzie also uses distance learning for staff inservice and to provide teleconferences between community members and agencies. It is hoped that community members will use the facilities to take courses for general learning or college credit.

"Distance learning enables us to offer a lot of things that our students ordinarily wouldn't have access to," said Scrivner. "We couldn't afford to get a Japanese teacher up here for one period a day," added Conklin. In short, distance learning is one component that enables McKenzie High School to keep pace with larger school districts while maintaining the advantages of a small school.

Meeting the Needs of Junior High Students

Conklin started a "school within a school" to meet the needs of junior high students. "There's a huge difference in physical size and emotional maturity between a seventh grader and a senior," said Scrivner. "And what Russ has done, along with the staff, is a really good job of recognizing the differences. So, we're better able to meet the needs of the junior high student whose concerns are a lot different from the older students."

The McKenzie staff uses several methods to give separate attention to junior high students. In the morning, classes are staggered. Thus, junior high students are not in the halls at the same time as the high school students. The morning classes for junior high students are shorter in recognition of their shorter attention spans—and thus McKenzie has been able to add an extra period to the junior high day. "The more things you can do with these kids, the better," added Scrivner.

The two groups don't eat lunch together. However, because it is a small school with a small staff, the teachers who teach junior high in the morning also teach high school classes in the afternoon. Therefore, the afternoon junior high periods are the same as those for high school students; this is when junior high students have classes such as physical education, band, word processing, health, and home economics. Conklin said that staff members from another small school district (Sisters, Oregon) visited McKenzie several times last year and told Conklin that they intended to model their new high school after McKenzie's "two schools in one."

The school district allowed the McKenzie teachers to form a junior high team composed of the special education teacher, the counselor, plus staff who teach junior high English, social studies, science, and math. The group meets one a week for one period to discuss curriculum, student problems, and any other issues of concern. The approach to collaborative problem-solving works well, said Scrivner, "because some teachers get along with some students better than others. If there's a method of handling a student that works, and if we can share that, it creates less problems for teachers and gives the kid a little more success."

The team is also involved in scheduling. In addition, Scrivner is excited that the team is now in the process of developing an interdisciplinary junior high curriculum so that math and science, for instance, may be taught as one unit.

Good Parent Turnout for Conferences

Another thing McKenzie does right, said Conklin, is a lot of communicating with parents. "We know period by period if students are absent, and we send letters constantly to parents on lack of attendance or whatever. I think we go way overboard in communicating, both about academics and attendance," he said. In most districts, turnout for parent-teacher conferences in secondary schools is invariably low, said Conklin. This was true for McKenzie. When Conklin arrived at the school in 1982, the number of parents who showed up for conferences was 5 percent. Conklin decided to institute a plan similar to one used by elementary schools that schedules parents to come in and meet with the student's guide teacher. The staff holds these conferences in conjunction with the elementary schools, making it easier for parents who have children in elementary and high school to attend both conferences.

During the first year of the plan's implementation, 72 percent of the students were represented by parents at the conferences. Conklin said the rate has stayed between 71 and 75 percent though the years. "A lot of parents are

scared of schools," he said. "So it's really positive getting parents to come for conferences. Now parents feel like that's their special time to come, and they do."

Special Efforts to Help Students Graduate

Out of 220 students, Conklin considers about 50, or 25 percent, to be at risk. These students are assigned staff members who act as mentors to support and help the students graduate. Conklin said the program has worked well:

> Because of our nurse sticking with one student, that fellow is going to see his diploma. But she's going to have to work with him right down to the last day. This is a student whose father told him this year, "I bet you'll never see a high school diploma." But we, the school, are the ones who will see to it that this boy will earn his diploma here.

Students can't get a McKenzie diploma by merely passing a class, Conklin explained. Conklin has instituted a competency system, patterned after Portland schools, that requires students to score in the fiftieth percentile, at the eighth-grade level, on an achievement test in order to receive a diploma. Students have to meet this competency level in reasoning, reading, math, and through a writing sample. "It's been a powerful motivator," Conklin said. "We've had seniors take a special class and write and write until they learned the proper style and procedures sufficient to earn the diploma."

Graduation requirements at McKenzie are tougher than at many schools. Students must pass twenty-six units of credit, while most schools require twenty-three. "We could have students who could go forty miles to Springfield and earn a high school diploma there, either because they don't meet the twenty-six credits or the competency system here," said Conklin. "We expect more than other districts, but we have decided to stay with that. Our kids, for the most part, come through, because graduating from this school is important to them."

Smaller Can Be Better

Both Scrivner and Conklin believe that the school's small size is an asset. Through a swap program, students from McKenzie can choose to go to school in Springfield or vice versa. Conklin said he has parents who are now electing to send their students forty miles up the river to McKenzie rather than to a middle school in the Springfield district.

"I've had parents tell me that, because of the structure, they feel their son or daughter is safer here," Conklin said. "So they send their child here, where, because of the smallness, we can keep far better track of the student."

Scrivner said that when he first came to McKenzie his desire was to go on to a big school or college. "But in a small school, you are able to go down the hall in the morning and say hello to every kid by name," he said. "That gives you a lot more impact on the kids because you can reach them."

Support from Administration and Staff

Scrivner said that he loved teaching and thought he could be happy in many places. "But I truly do enjoy it here," he explained, "because of the kids and the community, and because of the support we get from the administration and the school board. And the staff here is great!"

Scrivner said that the newest person on the staff has probably been at McKenzie five years, and a number have been there twenty. Half of the staff has the difficulty of commuting from the Eugene area, "but we work really well together," added Conklin.

McKenzie is just beginning to get into cooperative learning. "We've visited other schools where they're doing that," said Conklin. "You need to have variety in teaching so that you reach as many students as possible. There is no panacea in education. We try to meet the needs of the parents and kids up here as best as we possibly can."

North Eugene High School
A 21st Century School—Eugene, Oregon

North Eugene High School has changed its image from that of a high school known for athletics to one known for academics, from that of a school with difficult students to one where students are motivated to learn.

"This is a school that has gone through a great deal of change," said Byron Dudley, assistant principal of curriculum. "When I came here nine years ago, I felt it was a very fragmented school. Teachers were isolated in their own departments. It didn't have the sense of purpose or unity nor the kind of student accomplishment that it does now."

Prior to arriving at North, George Jeffcott taught at a middle school. Recalling his first year at North, before the administration was reorganized, Jeffcott stated:

> My first year was absolutely shocking. Kids were jumping all over desks, and the principal didn't back up teachers in discipline. Also, I

came with lessons from the middle school that I had made harder for high school students. Yet, I found that I had to make these plans *easier* for the kids at North—it was that bad.

The New Leadership

The story of North Eugene High School's turnaround began in 1984 with a total reorganization of the administration. Bob Anderson was asked to come in as the new principal, Dudley was moved into the position of assistant principal of curriculum, and two other people were hired, an assistant principal of operations and an assistant principal for athletic activities, buildings, and grounds.

At that point, Dudley recalled, the four began meeting together to share their vision for improving the school. "What emerged was a clear sense of direction," he said. "Essentially, the direction we are committed to is to provide excellent instruction in a caring environment. That became our mision, a double goal, or achievement, in two specific areas."

From 1984 to 1989, the administration was basically concerned with school improvement. The administrative team began a series of staff training sessions offering new instruction techniques; a committee was formed called "Onward to Excellence"; and the school linked up with the Northwest Regional Educational Lab in Portland. North also opened the second school-based health clinic in Oregon in 1986.

Beginning about 1989, recounted Dudley, the administrators saw some improvement in terms of

North Eugene High School

High School: Grades 9-12

Location: One of four high schools in Eugene (population 117,000).

Student Body Size: 1,049

Staff Size: 93 (63 certified teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Serves the lowest socioeconomic group in Eugene, but with a wide variety of students. Fairly mobile population (approximately 10 percent of school's enrollment in 1991-92 appeared for first time).

Free and Reduced Lunch: 104 students

Unique Characteristics: A 21st Century School (in process of restructuring); curriculum not by grade but divided into three levels (Entry, Core, Application), with performance standards; Freshman House Program piloted in 1991-92 year; second school in Oregon to open school-based health clinic.

Awards: One of nine Oregon network schools selected by State Administrators Association for "promising practices" (1990); selected as one of five high schools recommended for national recognition by Oregon Department of Education (1991); received three 2020 School Improvement grants (1990, 1991, 1992); one of three high schools in Oregon to receive a Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) grant (1991); principal recognized by the Administrators Association for his leadership (1987-88) and for leadership with integrity (state award, 1992); Lucille Nielsen Career Center nationally recognized for outstanding program in assisting students (1988).

Dropout Rate: 1985-86—14 percent; 1989-90—4 percent; on the average over last several years—6.5 percent. Recognized in 1992 as one of three schools in Oregon to significantly reduce their dropout rate.

College Bound: 1984-85—34 percent of students went on to college; 1990-91—82 percent went on to two- or four-year colleges; 1991-92—89 percent are planning to go to two- or four-year colleges.

attendance, test scores, and students going on to college but weren't satisfied with the pace of the progress. They then embarked on a series of school restructuring projects.

Grants for Restructuring

The school received its first 2020 School Improvement and Professional Development Program grant in April 1990. "Out of that first grant, we determined we were going to try to get a better understanding of what the future would look like for our students and the kinds of skills they would need to be successful," said Dudley.

In April 1991, the school was selected as one of three Oregon high schools to receive a Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) grant because of the quality of work under way and the staff's commitment to be innovative leaders. In July of that same year, the school received its second 2020 grant, and the focus became the creation of a student-centered learning environment rather than a teacher-centered one. "We are moving to an environment where students work cooperatively, where teachers really serve more as a coach rather than the impeccable authority on a subject," said Dudley.

The school also continued to work on providing essential skills for survival in the twenty-first century, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, and the importance of working cooperatively. The third 2020 grant was received in April 1992. It provides the school an opportunity to continue to work on curriculum restructuring using David Conley, associate professor within the University of Oregon's College of Education, as a consultant.

An Array of Awards

The school and administration have continued to receive awards and recognition. In May 1990, North Eugene was one of nine Oregon schools selected by COSA for "promising practices." In February 1991, it was one of five Oregon high schools recommended for national recognition by the Oregon Department of Education.

Principal Bob Anderson was recognized in 1987-88 by COSA for his leadership and recognized again in 1992 for "leadership with integrity," a new state award.

Innovative Curriculum

A major part of the school's restructuring plan involves curriculum and assessment. North Eugene is currently in the process of changing the traditional structure of the academic year for freshman through senior years. It is a three-level course of study referred to as transitioning into school and transitioning out.

The new levels are:

1. *Entry Level*—the transition into high school. The length of time students spend in this level will vary from two to four semesters, depending on their rate of progress toward exhibiting mastery of entry level skills.
2. *Core Level*—the acquisition of core skills. The focus at this level will be on an integration of curriculum with an emphasis on cultural diversity and the arts. Students will earn a certificate of mastery at the conclusion.
3. *Application Level*—the acquisition of advanced skills. Students will formulate a personal education plan for advanced classes and offcampus experiences. This is the transition out of high school. Students completing this level will earn a certificate of advanced mastery.

Dudley said that, as far as he knew, North Eugene High School was the only school in Oregon reorganizing curriculum into these levels.

Assessment and Standards

The way teachers assess academic progress is also changing. Teachers are moving away from true-false and objective tests to essay exams. The staff is now evaluating students using alternative methods such as portfolios, demonstrations, or group projects where the entire group receives a grade as opposed to individual grades.

During the summer of 1992, the school held workshops focusing on achievement standards that should be expected in content and performance. "It's critical that there be clear standards that are measurable at each of the three curriculum levels so that we know that students have, in fact, advanced to the next level," said Dudley.

Gary Craven, social studies teacher at North, agrees. "I think whether the school makes a difference or not," he commented, "depends on what happens between the students and teachers. I think at North you find a large number of teachers trying to raise standards, trying to ensure that all students are held accountable for what they learn."

Freshman House Pilot Project

Last year, Craven worked with a pilot program called Freshman House. The goal was to make freshmen more successful in their transition to high school. "We've discovered, by looking at our statistics, that we lose more kids as freshmen than at any other period." Craven explained. "If you fall behind as a freshman, you have a difficult time ever catching up." There also has been frustration, he added, about the ability of freshmen to do high school work.

The Freshman House program began with two houses involving approximately sixty students, four teachers, one administrator, and one counselor in each house. The program has expanded this year to include all freshmen. The guiding principles have been to keep students working together in smaller units, to give personal attention to student needs via weekly advisory meetings, to set high expectations for student attendance and performance and give frequent feedback and evaluation, and to encourage peer support. The Freshman House program keeps freshmen together for three periods each morning.

This year, North is a closed campus for students at Entry Level. They will have no offcampus privileges. "There's a concern with a more structured environment for these kids," said Dudley. "Our Freshman House program tries to keep a closer watch on freshman," Craven continued. "We monitor them more closely and try to be sure they're not slipping through the cracks because they're missing classes or not turning in assignments. If a student is skipping a class, we know very quickly." He recounted a complaint from a student who asked, "How come when I skip one class everybody gets on my case?" "Because we all want you to succeed," Craven responded.

At the end of the first semester last year, it was discovered that freshmen in the program had significantly better attendance than those not in the program. In addition, Freshman House participants had better grade point averages and were tardy less often.

Craven views the pilot project as a success. "It wasn't perfect," he said. "There were difficulties, and it does take extra time and work. But it was effective, and it did help. It's our opinion that getting a good start at the freshman level is critical."

Fewer Dropouts

Another area experiencing a turnaround at North is the dropout rate. In 1985-86, the dropout rate for North Eugene students was 14 percent; in 1987-88, the rate declined to 11.6 percent; in 1988-89, there was a dramatic

decrease to 3.5 percent, and in 1989-90, the rate was 4 percent. Dudley said the average rate over the last several years has been about 6.5 percent, which he believes is consistent with the other high schools in Eugene. In the summer of 1992, Superintendent of Instruction Norma Paulus selected North Eugene as one of three schools that have significantly reduced their dropout rates.

As a result of the new graduation requirements, all graduating seniors must complete "the new basics" to qualify for a diploma. A new Honors diploma is available to students. To qualify, students must have a GPA of 3.5 or higher, complete 240 credit hours, and complete a community service requirement of 120 hours. This new diploma option commenced with the class of 1990 and is a means of further encouraging students to exceed minimum graduation requirements.

Number of Students Going on to College Skyrockets

Eight years ago, said Dudley, North had 34 percent of its students going on to two- or four-year colleges. In the last three years, the figures have risen dramatically, to 82 percent in 1990 and 89 percent in 1992, according to Dudley.

North's Lucille Nielsen Career Center, nationally recognized for its outstanding program, is staffed by parent volunteers who try to match students to colleges. In the last four or five years, the staff has also secured well over a million dollars in scholarship aid for North Eugene students.

Health Clinic Assistance

Craven points to North's health clinic as one way the school is trying to meet students' greater needs. The clinic provides both medical and psychological help.

"I probably refer a couple of kids a year to it," said Craven, "for some kind of issue they're facing—a family or grief problem, or occasionally a rape situation. The clinic does a wonderful job, along with the Student Assistance Program, which works directly with kids who have drug problems." The two nurses at the clinic oversee a series of support groups—really a group counseling program, said Dudley—in addition to seeing approximately 1,000 students each month. The clinic also offers a Natural Helpers program that uses students who are trained to help each other.

Leadership Facilitates Involvement of Others

Craven and Dudley point to Anderson's leadership style as a reason behind some great changes at the school. "Bob Anderson set the stage and allowed people to try ideas," Craven said, "and he's brought people together. He's definitely excellent when it comes to giving people the latitude and resources to work on change." As an example, Craven cited the many different classes and workshops that Anderson has encouraged teachers to attend.

"Anderson's greatest strength is what he brings out in us," said Dudley. All the restructuring, Craven added, has been facilitated by the administration but is really teacher-generated: teachers making decisions about what they want to do. "Bob's made it easier for us. He's made it safe," said Craven. "But it's not a program that he's done himself. We've all decided in what direction we want to go."

For example, last year their 2020 grant was codirected by two classroom teachers (Craven was one of them) instead of department leaders and administrators. Also, the staff president last year was the financial clerk who works in the front office. "She's a classified, not a certified, person," Dudley explained, "and that's an example that the key leadership positions in the building don't necessarily go to the people you would expect."

Craven said that in the last four or five years at least half the teachers have had some kind of leadership role. Dudley added that the school makes decisions based on research and by consensus. "We do not vote. We believe that when you vote, you have winners and losers," he said. Instead, the staff uses a technique where red, yellow, and green circles indicate "I can't support it," "I can support it, but I'm not enthusiastic," or "I can support it." "As long as we have somebody who says, 'I can't support it,' we work the issue," Dudley said. "I think there's a lot of toleration for differences among us."

Student and Parent Input

Student and parent input is encouraged, active, and has a positive impact on various school programs. For example, all the building restructuring committees have student members. Eight students attended a staff retreat a year ago, and it was the students who suggested that North institute a Freshman House program. Students have been taken along to visit other schools in New York, Washington, and California. Dudley said the people in the schools they visited expressed surprise, saying, "We've never had a student here as a visitor before."

About thirty parents are involved in the college advisory program, a very active Booster Club, in addition to parents who volunteer in the main office. "We urge parents to get involved," said Dudley.

Faculty Involvement

David Conley, North's consultant at the University of Oregon, in a letter to the 21st Century Schools Council and Grant Readers, cited the high degree of faculty involvement combined with the facilitative leadership style at the school as reasons for North's success. "These factors blend to create an atmosphere where it is teachers, students, parents, and community who 'own' educational reform and restructuring, not a select group of administrators and teachers," he writes.

Craven said he really enjoyed teaching at North. "I don't know any place else where I would have the same opportunity to influence the direction of the whole school," he said. "Teachers often don't feel very well respected. So when you have a chance to work in a place where you feel your opinion and value counts, that's worth a lot."

Calapooia Middle School
Accentuate the Positive—Albany, Oregon

Over a dozen years ago, when Calapooia was a junior high school, it was known as the school on "the other side of town," considered "rough," and nicknamed "cow pie" by students across town. Paul Nys, principal of Calapooia Middle School since its inception ten years ago, said the school was considered the worst junior high school in the district. Kary Daniels, a classroom teacher at Calapooia for the last ten years, agrees that in earlier years Calapooia was known for having "the harder type of student" and more discipline and attendance problems than other junior high schools.

Calapooia has made a complete turnaround. Nys said, "We progressed from a time when parents refused to send their kids here, to today, when we have waiting lists for students and teaching staff who want to transfer here." "Now we're known as the middle school with the *best* discipline program," said Daniels. "We knew we had arrived when somebody saw a real estate ad in the newspaper advertising homes that said, 'near Calapooia Middle School'."

The turnaround came early in the middle school's history. Nys said the staff had a strong program in place, and during the school's first year as a middle school they had a site visit. "We were making real progress," said Nys; "but it wasn't until we won the National School of Excellence Award in that first year (1982-83) that our image changed." Daniels also credits the turnaround to a consistent and cooperative work environment, the new program, and good leadership.

The majority of students at Calapooia tend to be from middle-class backgrounds. However, Daniels said there is a "sizeable minority that would fit the description of a lower socioeconomic class. One of our feeder schools," he explained, " has a very high transient population and a higher number of kids who are from a lower economic background." Both Nys and Daniels said, though, that the school doesn't get the extremes of the very wealthy or the very poor. Ninety-four percent of the students are Caucasian.

Calapooia Middle School

Middle School: Grades 6-8

Location: One of three middle schools in Albany (population: 29,500). Surrounded by apartment complexes and small houses.

Student Body Size: 750

Staff Size: 67 (46 certified teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Majority are middle-class, with sizeable minority of lower-socioeconomic class from one or two feeder elementary schools. No extremes of very wealthy or very poor; 94 percent white.

Free and Reduced Lunch: 200 students

Unique Characteristics: Cross-graded school (Levels I, II, and III, based on performance and achievement); four tribes of mix of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders who stay with same homeroom teacher all three years; strong student positive recognition programs; courtesy and politeness campaign; program of academic assistance; writing across the curriculum; job shadowing program with City of Albany and Youth Service program; shared decision-making among administration and staff.

Academic Achievement: Inherit students who are low academic achievers. Documented growth of two groups of students using CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills)—by time students were eighth graders, they were approaching national norms, and by time they left eighth grade, students were above national norms.

Awards: Blue Ribbon Recognition State Award (1991-92); Associated Oregon Industries Award to school for highest level of educational excellence, and to principal for outstanding educational leadership (1991); National School of Excellence Award (1982-83); on the Oregon Department of Education Site Visit List; Oregon Middle School Association's publication, "Promising Practices," has reported on the school in each year's edition; three distinguished teacher awards received by staff; two classified employees named "Employee of the Year."

Attendance: 94 percent (1991-92)

A Successful Cross-Graded Program

The cross-graded program at Calapooia has been in place ten years and supports continuous progress for students. Students are assigned to Level I, Level II, or Level III rather than sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, and they can move forward at their own pace any time during the school year.

Initial placement of students is based on interpretation of test scores, past performance, and teacher recommendation. Students are monitored during the first semester and adjustments can be made at that time.

Each level is based on performance or achievement, not on ability. A student may be in Level II for reading and Level III for math. A Level II class may be a mix of seventh and eighth graders, or a Level III class a combination of seventh and eighth graders. "We try not to mix sixth graders with eighth graders," said Nys. "That has not been a good practice, and we do it very rarely." It is also rare for a student to move back

to a lower level. Some classes, however, contain students of mixed academic ability from the strongest to the weakest. This mixing occurs in classes such as physical education, science, and electives.

Calapooia's Tribes: Four Schools within a School

The student body of approximately 750 is divided into four tribes (or houses) that function like extended families. This gives the kids an identity within the school. Each tribe is a fairly even mix of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders and includes about ten to twelve staff members. The whole tribe isn't together during the entire day. For rare occasions requiring the attendance of the whole tribe, such as awards assemblies, each tribe decides how it wants to approach the event. "There's an opportunity for a smaller group to do things the way they'd like to do them," said Daniels. "You can try things out on a smaller scale, and if it doesn't work, we haven't ruined everyone's day."

Even though the whole tribe is rarely together at any one time, the students generally stay in the same tribe with the same core teachers for the duration of their middle-school years. "We think the key to it is keeping kids with the same homeroom teacher for three years," said Daniels. "For example, this year I started with a new group of sixth graders, even though I don't teach sixth-grade (or Level I) classes. I'm the one who does the conferencing with the parents. Then I'll have those kids next year in seventh grade—and some will be in my classes—and then the following year, they'll be with me again as eighth graders."

Tribe classrooms and lockers are located close to each other. Next year, many teachers in each tribe will have a common prep period to share and plan the curriculum with more of an interdisciplinary approach.

Nys thinks the cross-grading and tribe system works well:

> We believe the tribe arrangement more closely matches society—in other words, a combination of different ages, differences in abilities, interests, and emotional and physical makeup. The younger ones learn from the older students. And we think the smaller groups allow us to model or train kids more adequately.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing across the curriculum was introduced during Calapooia's second year as a middle school. "In this area, we deal specifically with writing mechanics. We expect good punctuation and spelling," said Nys. Thus, physical education teachers include an essay question as part of exams, industrial arts teachers require proper spelling in students' daily logs, the art teacher assigns a written paragraph each week, and the band teacher has

students write about composers or musicians. Students are also encouraged to contribute to a student newsletter and are awarded lunch-line passes or milkshakes for their efforts.

Job Shadowing and Youth Service Programs

There are two programs in effect at Calapooia providing students with learning experiences outside the school environs. A job shadowing program allows students to be absent from school for half of a day. Students follow or "shadow" an employee of the city of Albany (Calapooia didn't just ask a local business to be their school-business partner—they invited the entire staff of the city to join them to help kids!).

The Youth Service program involves student volunteers in community youth projects. These volunteers gain recognition through photographs posted in the hall and can earn lunch-line passes by accumulating ten and twenty-five hours of community service. Those who work over fifty hours get a school-sponsored trip to the wave pool at Willamalane Park and Recreation Center in Springfield.

Increases in Achievement

Sixth graders who enter Calapooia from the six feeder elementary schools arrive with basic skills below the national norm in a number of areas. "Basically, we inherit kids who are low academically," said Nys. In some instances, tests reveal serious deficiencies in spelling, math, computation, and language mechanics.

When the students are tested as eighth graders, however, all but two areas have been above the national norms for the past three years. Using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), Calapooia documented the growth of two groups of students who entered as sixth graders. By the time the students were eighth graders, the first quartile students were approaching the national norm for all students. "And by the time the eighth graders leave our middle school, their skills are well above the national norms," said Nys. "Our basic premise is that our kids do much better in one year than students across the U.S."

Awards and Recognition

The school has won its share of awards. In 1991, the Associated Oregon Industries bestowed upon Nys, the principal, an award for outstanding leadership and the school an award for educational excellence.

This past year, the school won the Blue Ribbon Recognition State Award and will advance to the national level.

Calapooia is also included on the Oregon Department of Education Site Visit List and has had over 300 educators and parents visit the school in the last ten years. Three Distinguished Teacher Awards have been received by staff members, and two classified employees have been named "Employee of the Year." In addition, Oregon Middle School Association's publication *Promising Practices* has reported on Calapooia in each year's edition.

Positive Recognition Program

Another major aspect in Calapooia's turnaround is its positive student recognition. According to Daniels:

> What we try to do is find some way to recognize every kid we can. We have programs that recognize academics, but we also have programs that recognize social behavior. It's the combination of academics and social behavior that we're trying to encourage, and it works together. Because school is not just academics, although that's very important, we also value cooperative behavior and the social things we think society is asking us to do also.

"Catching" students doing something right has replaced the old model of penalizing students when mistakes are made. Dramatic changes in individual behavior have been noticed as a result of this positive reinforcement.

Some of Calapooia's many programs used to motivate and reward students are as follows:

1. *Gold Card Program.* Cards are awarded to students who turn in all of their assignments on time during a grading period. Teachers record this information on six-week reports. Privileges include being part of prize drawings and being excused before others at lunch. "We have about five or six kids in each homeroom who qualify for that, so there are about 180 or 200 kids who have all turned in every piece of work that's been assigned," said Nys.

2. *Homeroom GPA Winners.* Students in the homeroom with the top collective grade point average are honored each quarter. A trophy is displayed in the hall for students of those homerooms.

3. *Courtesy Programs.* Students who say "thank you," "please," or "you're welcome," or who patiently wait for someone to complete a conversation, may be handed a courtesy card. If they accumulate two cards in a month, they receive a free ice cream bar at lunch, or they may use one card to come into the building early. (Through this and other programs, said Nys,

the school has given out more than 12,000 ice cream bars in the last four years.) In addition, courtesy cards are placed in a box for a monthly drawing and two teachers take six polite and courteous students to lunch at a pizza parlor.

4. *VIP Honor Passes.* Passes are given to students on the basis of citizenship and attendance, not academics. Cardholders can leave a class a minute early, be released five minutes early on Friday afternoons, or receive special treats during the quarter.

5. *Students of the Month.* Four boys and four girls are selected each month as outstanding citizens. Certificates are given and photos posted.

6. *Lunch-Line Passes.* Teachers may reward good behavior by handing a student a lunch-line pass. This allows the cardholder to move to the front of the lunch line every day for a week.

Academic Assistance

The Academic Assistance program was one of the first innovations put into effect at the school. It is a three-phase program. In Phase I, students are expected to turn in all assignments on time and to the teachers' satisfaction. Students are expected to have an assignment sheet in their notebook and to make up work when they are absent. The goal is 100 percent completion of the work.

If they are unsuccessful in Phase I, students go to Phase II. At this point, teachers refer students to a counselor who assigns them to thirty-minute tutorial sessions Tuesday through Friday. Parents are contacted and asked to initial assignment sheets in an effort to ensure that their child completes assignments. These students cannot participate in intramural discovery activities (the less structured, high interest activities) because of a time conflict with tutorials. Students are kept in Phase II for a minimum of two weeks. If, during that time, they bring up their grades and turn in their assignments, they are released to reenter the intramural discovery activities.

If they aren't successful at Phase II—some teachers keep them in for three or four weeks or longer—they then go to Phase III. At this level, the students are referred to the principal, who then works with a small group of about ten to twelve students.

"These are the really difficult youngsters with very little interest in school," said Nys. "I have a program set up so that we monitor their work in class, their on-task behaviors, and their assignments every day. And, if they aren't successful, then they stay after school with me in my office and get individual help with their lesson." Often, Nys said, he will see substantial changes the following year. "It's kind of fun to work with kids who are real challenges," he added. "I've had some astounding successes."

Communication with Parents

"We try to report to parents as much as we can about how the student is doing," said Daniels. Calapooia has gone from a nine-week grading system to a six-week one. Many of the teachers have adopted a computer grading system and issue reports weekly or every other week. Parents come in for frequent meetings with a single teacher or group of teachers when their child experiences problems. "We try to figure out what's going on with this particular child so that we can help the student do better. We realize that in middle school there are more changes taking place in the student than at any time since birth. So you have to offer all kinds of things and have a lot of strategies for dealing with problems as they come up," said Daniels.

Shared Decision-Making

One of the ways to success, said Daniels, is to involve students as much as possible in leadership and planning. All school events are planned with student input—picnics, dressup days, community service projects—and many teachers develop classroom rules *with* students.

Teachers and staff are encouraged to have an impact on school success, and both Nys and Daniels mentioned this policy as a reason for the school's success and staff cohesion. A shared decision-making model is used at Calapooia. Teachers participate in hiring decisions, develop the master schedule of classes, and make philosophical and practical decisions on middle school curriculum.

One avenue for input is through the tribes. The ten or twelve teachers in each tribe meet once a month to discuss issues or concerns. Each of these four groups is headed by a team leader; these leaders meet weekly with Nys to plan and manage the school and to deal with schedule changes and requests.

Two elected representatives from each tribe, plus one counselor, form the Principal's Council. The council meets monthly with Nys to respond to requests from staff for major purchases, to discuss a new program, or call for assessments or evaluations. Reports of the meeting are distributed to every staff member. "We have a really strong participatory type of decision-making, and we do it by consensus. The staff buys into the idea that they make a difference—and they do," said Nys.

Parent Involvement

Nys has invited parents to serve on the Principal's Council, but so far no one has taken him up on his offer. Still, both Nys and Daniels spoke of the

strong parent support and involvement in the school. "We organized a booster group," Said Nys, "and they have just been phenomenal in providing extra things for the staff and students." For example, they have painted hall lockers, expanded bike racks, converted the dining room, and provided outdoor basketball courts. These parents also host parties and dances for the students.

Parents may visit the school at any time by simply checking in at the office. An estimated 83 percent of the parents attended parent-student homeroom teacher conferences in October 1991. "Our school has the highest rate of parent participation in the fall conferences," said Nys. During 1990-91, 1,007 parent volunteer hours were recorded. "I think we're supported a lot by the parents in all of our programs," Daniels commented. "Any time we've asked parents to help us out or do things, they are there."

Good Leadership and a Strong Staff

Positive leadership and a strong, cohesive staff have been emphasized as major reasons for Calapooia's success. "I think we've been successful because of our organization, expectations, and the leadership that we have here. It's all come together to make this a really good school," said Daniels. "I can't say enough about Paul," he added. "Paul deserves all the recognition he's gotten because he's done a very good job of presenting the needs of the middle school to the school board and community. He's been an extremely hard fighter for the middle school programs throughout the years."

Nys said the staff also contributes greatly to the school's success. "We have a staff who are a group of problem-solvers," Nys said. "When we're confronted with an obstacle, we feel we can overcome it, and we set in motion objectives and goals and then seek to alter, revise, or design a program that meets student needs." An example was the staff response to the mandated transfer in 1990 of the class for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED) students to Calapooia. The staff accepted a failing program from another campus, and in less than a year, the SED students are experiencing few problems in mainstream classes.

Daniels concluded:

> I think the other thing that has made us successful is that we're always looking at ways to do something better. We look at a program and say, "OK, that works well. What else can we do?" So usually there's something new coming along. We're not satisfied with, "Well, it was good one year," and then everything stays the same. We have changed, and we have monitored and updated things as time has gone on.

Chapter 3

Schools with Changed Circumstances

Boise-Eliot Early Childhood Education Center
A Place for Family Involvement—Portland, Oregon

Ten years ago Boise and Eliot schools, located about a mile apart in the inner city of north Portland, were both early childhood education centers (ECEC). In 1980, members of the African-American community said, "We're bussing all of our middle school children out to Caucasian schools. We want a middle school in our own neighborhood." Sites were debated and eventually it was decided that Eliot would become what is now Harriet Tubman Middle School and the Boise building would become Boise-Eliot Early Childhood Education Center. Betty Campbell, principal of the merged school, said that Eliot had "more of a whole child philosophy of education."

The merger took several years. For the first three years, while planning and remodeling were taking place, the prekindergarten and kindergarten were moved back and forth between the two schools. Seven years ago, both schools were completely merged into the former Boise building.

The only thing that Sharon Dawson, kindergarten teacher at Boise-Eliot since its inception, doesn't like about the merger is that the school is so much larger. The total number of students from prekindergarten through fifth grade (ages four through twelve) is 788. That includes four to seven sections at every grade level. However, the classes are small. Kindergarten, for instance, has about twenty-five students in each class, with one certified teacher and one educational assistant for each section. The staff is large—about 100, including cooks and custodians—"like a big village," said Campbell.

Ethnic Diversity Includes Voluntary Desegregation

The school is ethnically diverse, with 48 percent African-American students, 43 percent Caucasian, 4 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Native-American, and 2 percent Asian. It also has a diverse socioeconomic mix. Sixty-one percent of the students are on free and reduced lunch, up from 53 percent last year, and Dawson said that a number of children are "very needy." However, two-thirds of the school population (or 400 students) is voluntarily bussed in from basically stable middle- and upper-class neighborhoods.

Boise-Eliot Early Childhood Education Center

Grade School: Prekindergarten to grade 5 (ages four through twelve)

Location: In innercity neighborhood in north Portland (population 444,000).

Student Body Size: 788

Staff Size: 100 (32 classroom teachers)

Socioeconomic Background: Ethnically diverse: African-American, 48 percent; Caucasian, 43 percent; Hispanic, 4 percent; Native-American, 3 percent; Asian, 2 percent. A number of neighborhood children are "very needy." Four hundred children are voluntarily bussed in from middle- and upper-class neighborhoods.

Free and reduced lunch: 61 percent

Unique Characteristics: One of seven early childhood education centers in Portland (includes prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten); a magnet school for voluntary integration; strong parent involvement program (11,000 parent volunteer hours this past year; all but one parent conference completed); free childcare four days a week at the school to allow parents to volunteer in classrooms or go on field trips; staff mentor program and mentor tutor program that follows a child from first through twelfth grade; before and after school enrichment activities.

Academic Achievement: Generally within the comparison group on Oregon Statewide Assessment Test in spring 1991 (grade 5 at either district or state average in listening and study skills).

Awards: *Reader's Digest* "Heroes in Education" award to principal—one of ten awards given nationally (1991); Milken Family Foundation award to principal for outstanding education in Oregon—one of six chosen (1992).

Boise-Eliot is a magnet school, one of seven ECECs in Portland. Each family in Portland can choose to send their child to their own neighborhood elementary school or to an ECEC that has been defined for their area. However, unlike the ECECs, neighborhood schools will probably lack a prekindergarten and full day kindergarten, said Campbell. "So, what we have now is voluntary integration. It's one of the few such programs in the nation that work, through the ECECs," said Campbell.

The Boise-Eliot philosophy emphasizes that each child is unique and that a gap often exists between a child's developmental age and his or her chronological age. Therefore, it is essential to provide individually for each child. Consequently, a program has been developed so each student can experience success through many opportunities for learning, a variety of materials and

equipment, and experienced adult guidance. *The curriculum fits the child* rather than the child fitting the curriculum.

Goals include increasing each child's self-esteem by providing maximum opportunities to experience success in learning; encouraging self-respect, creativity, and responsibility by helping children in their social and emotional development; emphasizing the cultural heritage of each child; and involving parents and the community in the program.

Family Involvement Program

Both Campbell and Dawson identify the emphasis placed on getting parents involved with the school as one of the major factors behind the school's success. Campbell strongly believes in family involvement, and it is listed as one of four school goals (along with math achievement, expanding reading and language usage, and a hands-on science program). Campbell said that the staff has worked very hard, and with great success, to increase the number of parent volunteer hours. The number of hours has risen from 5,000-6,000 two years ago to 8,800 last year, and to 11,000 this year. "Here we are—an innercity school. So I think that's quite a keystone," said Campbell.

"We've built trust with parents and families by doing home visits," Campbell added. Although Boise-Eliot has a community agent, the teachers, who are the ones involved most directly with the children, make many of the visits. All teachers must be willing to make home visits. "Usually, we try to do it within their work day," explained Campbell. "For example, if we're trying to get an address, the teacher will walk home with the child at 2:30. We also use staff meeting times, which are part of all teachers' contracts. There are times I say, 'We're going door to door tonight for our staff meeting'."

Dawson said she was glad to spend extra time getting families involved:

> It helps me out a lot. As a kindergarten teacher, when I have volunteers in the classroom, it really expands the opportunities I can offer to kids because a lot of the projects for kindergartners need an extra set of hands. We have very willing parent volunteers. We expect that and really try to promote it. I think family involvement is a component that needs to be in a successful school. Otherwise, too much is left to the schools.

More Ways to Involve Families

Parent involvement is reciprocal at Boise-Eliot. Parents volunteer their time and assistance to help improve the quality of education at the school, and the school offers programs to assist parents who want to sharpen their parenting skills. For example, classes are offered during the day and evening for parents, such as Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) seminars and anger management workshops. Family Night in the gym, computer lab, and/or the library is scheduled once a week so that families can spend time learning and playing together with their children. These are led by the child development specialist, computer teacher, and media specialist. A weekly newsletter is sent to families, and most classroom teachers send home a monthly or quarterly newsletter. Each family also receives a Boise-Eliot Handbook and Discipline Guide. The handbook includes specific suggestions for family involvement, based on Joyce Epstein's five types of parent involvement in schools. Parents are contacted daily about absentees. There is also a grandparents and foster parents club.

In addition, parents participate in interviews to select Boise-Eliot teachers. Boise-Eliot sponsors Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Campfire groups, and parents have organized and led these clubs. The Budget Review Committee also involves families. About twenty-five to fifty parents attend the local School Advisory Committee/Parent Teacher Organization meetings.

Parent conference attendance is particularly strong. "We had all but one of our 788 conferences this year," said Campbell. "All but one family either came to the school or we made a home visit. The year before that, it was approximately 785 out of 788. Therefore, I won't accept the notion that people with low incomes or who have a lot of needs won't be involved with the school—they *are* involved here."

Free Childcare

The Boise-Eliot handbook states that the one factor making the school's family involvement program so successful is that "a part of our atmosphere of welcoming and respecting families is to offer free childcare for children of volunteers from 8:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily and during most evening meetings." Campbell said free childcare for preschool children was started at Eliot School one day a week, and when the Boise school was renovated for the merger, a space was especially designed for childcare because Campbell and the staff believe it is such a priority. A private business shares this space and collaborates with the school to provide before- and after-school childcare.

Field trips, she explained, are the best way to begin to involve parents who are frightened of the school. With childcare provided at the school,

parents are free to go on a field trip or volunteer in classrooms. Campbell has a staff member who helps train parents in the care of children under age four. The childcare is free and provided through general funds.

The Importance of Early Enrollment

Campbell mentioned three areas that Boise-Eliot has been working to improve: the late enrollee ratio, the stability index of their neighborhood, and attendance.

"We wanted to get kids enrolled on the first day," Campbell said. "We felt that was an important part of family involvement—that every day a child was here we could help them to learn, but they need to be here every day." Late enrollees are those who wait until the first day of school or later to enroll, and that ratio, said Campbell, was very high a few years ago. Now, it has been reduced from 19.8 percent in 1989-90 to 12 percent last year—that means 7.8 percent more children started school on the first day.

Campbell said they have reduced the ratio by asking churches and TV stations to announce that school is starting, and it is time to get children registered. Word of mouth is also used—asking kids to tell their neighbors. In addition, the staff has gone door to door. "When we first came back to the neighborhood," said Campbell, "we divided up the blocks and just walked the streets announcing, 'School is opening this year. If you have children or know someone who does, get them registered'."

Stabilizing the Neighborhood

In 1989-90, gangs arrived from California, and the sale of crack and cocaine became a big enterprise in the neighborhood. People became fearful, said Campbell, and a lot of families moved. "I lost 100 neighborhood children in a matter of two months," she noted. "We've tried to get people calmed down, and we really had to come forth with some creative ways to stabilize the neighborhood. We want the neighborhood to see the school as a focal point of the community, a joyful learning center."

For instance, the staff initiated a whole menu of activities for second through fifth graders offered before and after school, such as drill team, jump rope, tumbling, choir, journalism, Spanish, a newsletter, and Junior Great Books. "Almost more than the children can keep up with," said Campbell. "This is one of the things we did to make a turnaround in terms of attracting children to the 'learning gang' to satisfy their need to belong." Many enrichment activities are also provided during school hours, including Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), Artists in Residence, Family Science, and Multicultural Education celebrations.

The stability ratio is the percent of the population that does not move between the beginning of one school year and the next. "We have made Boise-Eliot's stability ratio go up from 80.7 percent to 83.1 percent," said Campbell. "There's a school a mile away that has only a 49 percent stability index. If families are moving that much, you teach the children, but they're not in school a lot of the days. So we are hoping that all of our activities—and communicating about them to families—have helped stabilize and combat the negative influences that might be in the neighborhood."

Special Mentor Programs

Another area where Campbell feels the staff is doing things right is the two mentoring programs. First, there is a staff-mentor program started by two fifth-grade teachers. "Staff members take a child who may need a little extra encouragement," said Campbell, "and maybe they eat lunch with the child or pay attention to the child's schoolwork."

Campbell also started an innovative mentor-tutor program in connection with the fifth-grade scholarship fund. The idea originated with a parent. In this program, parents or community members mentor a child from first through twelfth grade. A requirement of the program is that mentor-tutors tutor the child at school. At present, the program is in its early stages. "I've said to people," Campbell explained, "that we need one-to-one all the way through. I need 788 staff-mentors and mentor-tutors. We don't have that many yet, so we select based on the most need. Between those two programs we're reaching quite a few children."

Different Ways of Assessing Children

Generally, Boise-Eliot students fell within their comparison group on the Oregon Statewide Assessment Test in spring 1991. Only grades 3 and 5 were tested. Grade 5 students scored at either the district or state averages in listening and study skills.

Dawson, who is frustrated by the emphasis on test scores, said the school is looking at different ways of assessing children. She mentioned a portfolio system as an alternative. "I like to see what a kid has learned from the beginning of the year to the end of the year," Dawson said, "and I think you can show that in ways other than standardized tests."

A Special Teaching Climate

"We have extremely high expectations and standards for children in terms of learning and behavior, such as manners, kindness, and peace. I think all that is what makes the climate here very strong. People keep telling me that it's a very joyful place to learn," said Campbell.

Dawson agrees that the climate at Boise-Eliot is special. "I think it's very supportive," she commented. "I know down in our unit we all help each other and share ideas. Because we're a big school, I think we gain a lot from each other." She also said the staff climate was a playful one. "It's kind of crazy and zany," she added. "I think that you struggle sometimes with difficult children and situations, and when you have camaraderie with the people there, it really helps." The kindergarten unit tries to do things together as a team after school. For instance, they held a bowling party and a golf tournament, and they celebrate birthdays. "I think that builds morale. Betty encourages that, although she doesn't participate herself because her time is so limited," Dawson said.

A Pioneering Staff

Campbell gives a great deal of credit to her staff. She said, "We have a staff that's willing to make seven or eight phone calls and go to the ends of the earth to get those family contacts made and to build trust and respect."

She also credits the teachers and staff with being "on the cutting edge" when it comes to methodology. For example, Campbell mentioned that many of her staff were doing whole language teaching before it was adopted by the district. "They are forerunners or pathfinders—pioneers in terms of reform. And these things come from the ground up instead of from the top down," Campbell emphasized.

Dawson agrees that the staff stays current: "Teachers take classes and find out what's working and what's new and innovative. We pride ourselves in being on top of what's happening out there." She referred to a math class she just finished this summer where the staff was asked to read research articles on testing and the ways children learn. "Betty also makes those kinds of opportunities available," she added. Dawson cited the DBAE—Discipline-Based Art Education—that the district wanted implemented. "Betty felt it was important for all of us to have that. Thus, she arranged it so we were able to take that class during our Monday night faculty meetings," Dawson said.

Staff turnover is low. There are many teachers, said Campbell, who were there before the merger and are still with the school. Dawson thinks the high staff stability is helpful. "The parents know us, and we know them," she

said. Currently, there are no openings for teachers, and because some people are returning from maternity leave, Campbell said she is actually going to have to cut some staff who want to be there—and this is an innercity school!

Dawson has stayed at Boise-Eliot all these years partly because she really likes the staff. "I can't think of any place I'd rather be," she said. "The teachers here are very concerned about the needs of children. We all have our days when it's frustrating, but people are creative and caring about children, and I think that's what I find special," she concluded.

Inspirational Leadership

While Campbell gives credit to the staff, Dawson raves about Campbell's leadership:

> I'm really one of her biggest fans. I feel that she allows me to be the very best that I can be. I think she understands the problems that we have in the classroom, and she works with us to try and figure them out. Her type of leadership is the kind that I appreciate, where she is able to delegate. There are certain boundaries, but I also feel that I pretty much get to run the show in my own classroom.

Boise-Eliot benefits from a combination of positive leadership and a strong staff. "I think Betty has pulled together a staff that's very committed to kids," Dawson added. "I think she provides leadership that is inspirational, and I think that trickles down into what's going on. I think she then gives us quite a bit of leeway within the classroom to do what we do best."

"It isn't that it's a top-down or bottom-up thing," claimed Campbell. "It's about working together and cooperating to have an end product, which for us is to have a learner who is ready to be a world citizen."

Awards to the Principal

Campbell has received two impressive awards while principal at Boise-Eliot. She received the *Reader's Digest* "Heroes in Education" award in 1991, one of ten awards given nationally. In 1992, she was selected for the Milken Family Foundation award for outstanding educator in the state of Oregon. Campbell was one of six educators chosen by Milken—and the only administrator; the rest were teachers.

Conclusion

Boise-Eliot has come a long way. In the days when Boise was a school on its own, students often did not take papers home but would dump them on the school lawn. "You rarely see a paper dropped now," said Campbell. "The students take a lot of pride in the school."

Before the merger, parents also did not want to get involved at Boise. Now Boise-Eliot has a large number of parent volunteers. Parents also sometimes go to great lengths to get their children into the school. To attend Boise-Eliot, children either have to live in the neighborhood or in one of Boise-Eliot's feeder school areas. "We have such a high reputation in parts of the city," Campbell said, "that we think people lie about their addresses to get their children into Boise-Eliot. They know we have high expectations, and they know their child is going to get an excellent education here."

Whiteaker Community Elementary School
A Model for Social Service Delivery—Eugene, Oregon

Last year, the Oregon Department of Education identified Whiteaker as the elementary school in Oregon with the highest number of disadvantaged children. Whiteaker Community Elementary School has always been financially poor, said Becky Lowry, third/fourth-grade teacher at the school since 1972. The financial resources of the school mirror those of the neighborhood. Lowry attended Whiteaker School as a child. She remembers the neighborhood, located in west Eugene, as being fairly stable on the east side, as it is now, but with more problems and turnover on the west side.

However, Nancy English, family outreach coordinator for Whiteaker, who has been with the school since 1976, said the community radically changed after the Washington-Jefferson bridge was built in 1967. Homes were torn down, and the bridge split the neighborhood in two. "So what happened," she said, "was that a fairly substantial blue collar neighborhood was destroyed when all that relocation was done."

No one argues that Whiteaker residents lack financial resources. The neighborhood has some of the lowest rents in town. Ninety-one percent of Whiteaker students qualify for free or reduced lunch. In addition, elementary-aged children from homeless shelters within the Eugene school district attend Whiteaker—89 this year, said English, out of a total of about 190 students. Neighborhood residents who are better off financially send their children to other city schools. About 100 children are sent outside the Whiteaker school district, said Principal Paul Randall (Patty Mantia 1992).

The turnover rate is an extremely high 187 percent, according to Lowry and English. Nearly 200 students moved on during the year. "Only about 40 percent of September enrollees are finishing out the school year," said Randall (Mantia). All this creates a school of primarily at-risk children.

Changes in School Population

Two dramatic changes have occurred in recent years, said English: (1) an influx of Hispanic students, who make up the majority of the school's 29 percent minority population, and (2) an influx of homeless families. "Until two or three years ago," said English, "we didn't really have homeless families, and we had no Hispanic students. We've also seen that the families are getting incredibly needier."

Whiteaker Community Elementary School

Elementary School: kindergarten through grade 5

Location: One of 24 elementary schools in Eugene (population 117,000).

Student Body Size: 180-190 students

Staff Size: 39 (16 certified teachers; 8 classrooms)

Socioeconomic Background: Identified by Oregon Department of Education as the elementary school with the most disadvantaged children in Oregon. Neighborhood has lowest rents in city. Turnover rate at 187 percent; 40 percent of September enrollees finish school year. Elementary-aged children from homeless shelters within school district attend the school—89 homeless children this year. Recent influx of Hispanics (Hispanics make up majority of school's 29 percent minority population).

Free and Reduced Lunch: 91 percent

Unique Characteristics: Becoming a national model for delivery of social services and collaboration with nonprofit agencies; uses Chapter 1 funds for instructional aides so students get "two shots" at reading and math; full-time bilingual nurse and full-time Family Outreach Coordinator (instead of other staff positions); small class size (averaged 21-23 students per class last year); "split" classrooms (first/second grade; second/third grade, and so on); computer lab accommodates at least 20 students; extensive afterschool program for students and evening activities for adults.

Academic Achievement: On last year's Oregon Statewide Assessment Test, students scored at, or close to, the state average; in some areas they surpassed the Eugene school district average.

Attendance: 93 percent

English described in detail the difficulties faced by Whiteaker students and families:

> I can tell you that this is a pretty traumatic place. Probably about 50 percent of our kids have been sexually or physically abused. The only meal many of them may get is the meal they get at school. We are seeing more and more children who are drug and alcohol affected. We have many children who have a parent in jail, and we have third and fourth generation kids here that have been on welfare.

Lowry said it is frustrating that so much staff time is spent on discipline, which takes away from time spent on academics. Deep-seated behavioral problems are being exhibited in kindergarten and first-grade classes, said Randall, who chose to be principal at the school five years ago. "These kids don't seem to connect any kind of consequence with their behavior.... Having one unruly child in a classroom is one thing, having between four and six is quite another," he added. "Until you sit here in this building for a week..., you really don't understand what it's like" (Mantia).

In spite of these obstacles, national attention was drawn to Whiteaker when the Oregon Department of Education revealed that Whiteaker students scored at or close to the state average on the Oregon Statewide Assessment Test given last spring. In some areas, scores even surpassed those of the Eugene school district (Mantia). English also thinks the Whiteaker scores were quite a bit higher than the scores of other schools that had been labeled as disadvantaged. She hasn't seen this year's scores, but Lowry has, and she said most of the children in her classroom showed improvement over last year. In addition to the test scores, the school has a daily attendance rate of 93 percent. This remarkable achievement is due to the innovative programs, described in the following sections, implemented at the school.

A Social Service Model

"We are becoming a social service agency rather than a school," said Lowry. "The social services take time away from academics, but until these kids' emotional and physical needs are taken care of, you can't teach them."

English said the social services program got started because there was a need and somebody had to meet it. Three years ago, English, Randall, and Kyda Dodson, the community school coordinator, set out to meet the needs of Whiteaker's students and families. "I think what happened," said English, "is that we tried to respond to crises by literally putting bandaids on—if somebody needed furniture, we got them furniture; if somebody needed clothing, we started doing clothing."

Under Randall's leadership, an extensive family outreach and social service program began. Showers were provided for students who needed them. The school's community room was filled with clothes, soap, shampoo, food, and other items. Vouchers to a local laundry were available to families, and the school nurse found free dental care for students who needed it.

Randall has been known to take children into his home—youth whose parents were in crisis, on drugs, or in jail—in addition to dipping into his own pocket to help fund Whiteaker projects such as building playground equipment or planting trees in the neighborhood. "Paul Randall is incredibly caring, wanting to do anything he can for the kids.... He has such heart. I think he wants these kids to succeed so bad," said Dodson (Mantia).

Collaboration with Other Agencies

Six months ago, Whiteaker School began receiving help in providing social services from the North Regional Assistance Program. The program is coordinated by the St. Vincent dePaul Society. Members include the community school coordinators in the north region, churches, and private and

nonprofit agencies. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, a representative of this program comes to Whiteaker, and community members can come in and tell her their needs. "What we're trying to do is streamline our operation and find other people who can carry some of the burden," said English.

The whole staff, and English in particular, works very closely with nonprofit agencies, such as Catholic Community Services, the Relief Nursery, Birth to Three, and the Oregon State University Extension Service, to provide a network of support for families. The school's delivery of social services for needy students and families is becoming a national model, states Mantia.

Family Advocacy

Whiteaker also does a great deal of advocacy work for their students and families. "I passionately believe," said English, "that most of these families are so disenfranchised that they have no one to advocate for them." She recalled accompanying a woman, whose food stamp records had gotten confused, to Adult and Family Services and making enough waves to get the woman back on food stamps. English is more involved in community organizations than most teachers. But she added, "There's not a staff member here who will not approach the appropriate agency to go to bat for a family."

However, both English and Lowry wonder how long the social service emphasis can go on as it is. The school district has a ratio staffing policy, and English said that Whiteaker doesn't have enough staff to do the kind of job she thinks they should be doing. Also, there is very little extra financial help. "This means I have to spend a lot of my time looking for money and grants, literally begging with my hand out, to run programs. So we're doing a lot of things right, but we're also working with a great handicap," English said.

Wise Staff Decisions

Part of the school's success is due to decisions the staff has made, said English. The staff decided that the school needed a nurse, and, with the influx of Hispanic students, the nurse must speak Spanish. So, they found and hired a full-time person. This decision is unusual—Whiteaker is the only elementary school in Eugene, and perhaps the only elementary in the state, that has a full-time nurse, commented English.

The staff also decided that they needed English as a full-time member in Whiteaker's Family Outreach Program. "Nancy's job is a new development at Whiteaker," said Lowry, "and we've chosen to have her instead of a counselor. She just has to be here. She does a tremendous amount for the families."

Making these decisions required sacrifices. For instance, the school does not have a full-time physical education teacher, librarian, or media specialist, and they have no counselor (the latter role is filled by the nurse and English).

Small, Split Classes

Another staff decision that benefits students was to offer small, split classes. English thinks Whiteaker's test scores are as high as they are because of the way classes are structured. "It has more to do with our being able to fit children into appropriate groups, having small classes, and having a teacher and aide in every class," English summed up.

Lowry said the average class size this year was twenty-one to twenty-three students, and English said it was never more than twenty-four, whereas classes in other Eugene elementary schools often average twenty-five to thirty students.

Whiteaker also has what English called "split classrooms"—that is, a first and second grade combination, a second and third grade, a third and fourth grade, and so on. "It's easier to fit students in that way because of our high turnover," English explained. "If a child comes in as a second grader in the middle of the year and is lower in skills, that child will go into the first-second combination. If the child is higher in skills, he or she will go into the second-third combination. This gives us more flexibility in placing students and putting them into appropriate groups."

Instructional Aides

The staff's decision to have an aide in every class is not standard practice. "Most Chapter 1 schools have a Chapter 1 class with a Chapter 1 teacher, where children go out of their regular classrooms to that Chapter 1 program," said English. "We don't do that. We put our Chapter 1 money into providing instructional aides in the classroom. So what happens is that the teacher can do the initial teaching in reading and math, and then the aide does a 'firm-up.' Therefore, the kids get two shots at reading and math every day." Next year each teacher will have a full-time aide.

Top-Notch Staff Needs More Support

Both Randall and English credit the commitment of the "top notch" staff. "I'd say Whiteaker is an incredible story," English said, "but I'd also say that it has taken a tremendous toll emotionally and physically on all of us. "I think this is an incredibly difficult school to work in. I think you find teachers becoming really stressed and burned out. I mean, I can't afford to

work fifteen hours a day forever." Randall agrees that teachers and staff are becoming more and more frustrated by trying to provide so many social services. "We think we've made it pretty clear to the district that we're pretty much on overload," he said (Mantia).

Actually, teacher turnover is very low. "They tend to stay," said English. She thinks, however, that if the amount of stress continues, along with the numbers of really dysfunctional families they are seeing, the school will see more teacher turnover in the future. "I think we need more support than we're getting," she said. "From everybody. I think we need it from the state, from the school district, from other social service agencies, and from the community—from the mayor on down."

Why do teachers and staff stay? "Because we're the only thing these kids and families have. Who else is going to advocate for them?" answered English.

Lowry has been teaching halftime in a partnership arrangement at Whiteaker for the past thirteen years. However, she said that she stayed not only because she liked her partnership, but also because of the leadership, the expertise of the teachers, and the professional development opportunities.

Teachers also help each other get through tough times. "I think throughout the year you'll find someone feeling burnt out," said Lowry. "But we try to support and listen to each other and build each other's spirits up so that we can come back and try again. I could go and knock on anybody's door after school and they would sit and listen. And I would do that for anybody else."

Professional Development Creates New Ideas

"What makes me feel good about teaching at Whiteaker," said Lowry, "is the chance for professional development, which then directly benefits the school." She explained that a lot of the extra teacher training has been provided through either Randall or English, who have made workshops available and informed the staff about upcoming opportunities. "Actually, Nancy just signed me up for one workshop and told me about it later," she added. "It's interesting and exciting. We're working together as a staff and we do a lot of planning together."

Lowry cited three workshops or trips that she took with others from the school; several ideas developed from those experiences. Last summer, for instance, Randall, English, Lowry, and three other classroom teachers traveled to Stanford to learn about the Accelerated Schools Program. As a result of that trip, the Whiteaker staff conducted two "Taking Stock" surveys, one for staff and one for the community. The staff survey contained questions such as, "Do we get support from our administrators?" For the

community survey, people were asked to rate staff performance on a scale of one to five. Questions included, "When dealing with office staff, do you feel you are treated in a courteous manner?", "Do you feel the Whiteaker staff is approachable?", and "Do you see homework as necessary?"

The staff will pick areas to work on in the coming year based on the information compiled from the surveys. Lowry said they also tried to reach families that choose not to send their children to Whiteaker to find out what those families want from a school.

Welcoming New Students

Some of the staff attended a workshop in Ashland, Oregon, on interventions for students with serious behavior problems. Another positive idea for Whiteaker came out of that workshop. "One thing we decided," said Lowry, "was to try to make our school more welcoming for new students, since we have such a high number of them throughout the year."

The staff developed a "New Kids on the Block" bulletin board. "When a child enters my room," Lowry explained, "he or she is given an interview sheet that's fun to fill out. Then the child's picture is taken, and they share a little bit about themselves from the sheet with the rest of the class." Later, their interview sheet and picture are put up on the bulletin board outside the office, and eventually the children take the materials home with them. "The parents are happy to have a photograph of their child," said Lowry, "because they don't get those very often. Response to the program has been wonderful. It works well for both the parents and the kids, making them feel welcome." Next year, Whiteaker will add another component to the program. The staff plans to train students to be peer partners—a sort of buddy system—to further welcome new students and familiarize them with the school.

The Reading Train

Lowry and Randall took a third trip to Dallas, Texas, to attend the Chapter 1 national meeting. They visited a number of schools there that were similar to Whiteaker's and came back with new ideas. One of these—putting up a train car for every book a student read to see how long a train the student could make—was perfect for adaptation to Whiteaker after a thousand books were donated to the school.

"We wanted some kind of way to get the kids reading," said Lowry. "So we took that train car idea and fit it in with those free books. We started it in March, and by the end of the school year, I believe the kids had read 600 books."

Strong Computer Program and Other Enrichment

Whiteaker also has a very strong computer program. Students go to the computer lab twice a week. "I know that some of the content is math-related," said Lowry, "so students are getting math in the classroom and they're also getting it with computers."

Lowry thinks that the amount of available computer lab time at Whiteaker is greater than at many other elementary schools. "Not all schools have lab set-ups," she explained. "Our lab is staffed by a teacher and run half-days, every day." Some schools, she continued, may have computers in their classrooms, but maybe only one or two. "We have enough computers in our lab to accommodate half of a classroom. I believe our computer teacher said she could accommodate up to twenty kids," said Lowry.

An extensive afterschool program exists for students, comprised of a homework club, sewing and dance classes, arts and crafts, and other classes that change every term. Students visit nursing home residents; the nurse runs a walking club for extra fitness for kids; and people come in and read stories to the children. In the evening the school is open for all kinds of activities, including adult programs. Anger management is a new class that has been added this year—a teacher's idea. "I just have to believe that anything extra that we do for these kids relates to their academic scores," said Lowry.

Lowry stated that the other important element at Whiteaker is to build self-esteem in the children. "That's our ultimate goal," she said. "If the kids believe they can do something, then we'll see it in their reading and math."

Although not part of Whiteaker School, a Headstart program and a preschool center occupy permanent sites on the school grounds. Next year, the Whiteaker Nonprofit Preschool and Infant/Toddler Center will be able to care for babies as young as six weeks.

School Is Home to Many Families

Randall and the staff have created a home-like atmosphere at the school. "Whiteaker has made itself so warm, caring, and helpful that families feel cheated if they're not connected to it," said Superintendent Margaret Nichols (Mantia). Many of the homeless families call the school their closest thing to a home. "For many children here, the only safe and stable place they've got is the school, and we've made it that way," said English. "I think that what we're accomplishing in this school is not happening in other communities that are like ours," English concluded.

Chapter 4

Common Attributes of Success

All the schools profiled in this Bulletin share common elements that contribute to their success. An overview of ten of these elements, including leadership, parent involvement, and social services, follows.

Leadership

All these schools have a principal who is considered by the staff to be at least partly responsible for the success of the school. In all three of the "turnaround" schools, the principal, either alone or as the leader of an administrative team, seems to be the key motivator behind the schools' positive changes.

The leadership style of all the principals is similar, even though their personalities differ. They are leaders who might be termed "transformational"— that is, their leadership style is particularly facilitative and collaborative. These principals include the staff in decisions and school governance, give teachers trust and freedom in the classroom, and encourage staff to be the very best they can be. All these principals spoke highly of their staff's contribution to the school's success. The teachers in these schools seem to feel a great deal of ownership because they have an opportunity to participate in decision-making. This involvement, in turn, has made for a happier and more effective staff.

All the schools appear to operate on a shared decision-making model (several make decisions entirely by consensus). The collaborative nature of the principal's leadership also extends to students, parents, and the community. These schools work because they are, as one teacher put it, involved in "a team effort."

The staff emphasized the helpfulness and support of the administration, school boards, and the school district as being a factor in the school's success.

Community and Parent Involvement

For schools in rural areas or in smaller communities, such as Sherman High School and Ashland High School, the community and school are mutually responsive to each other. In Sherman's case, the boundary between school and community couldn't be discerned. Others commented that their schools were responsive to their particular communities and fashioned curriculum and activities to suit their constituencies. If a community or neighborhood wasn't considered as supportive as it could be, these schools took the initiative (such as the surveys at Whiteaker Elementary School and the door-to-door efforts in the Boise-Eliot Early Childhood Education Center neighborhood) in reaching out to the community.

All the schools seem to be making great efforts to communicate more frequently with parents and to find different ways to involve parents in the school. For Boise-Eliot, parent involvement is one of the main focuses. Other schools are also concerned about bringing the parents into a partnership with them. These schools employ a variety of methods, such as parent-teacher conferences, with successful results. At some schools, efforts have been made to include parents in school governance and decision-making.

Finally, as part of community involvement, most of these schools have business partnerships and work/study programs with community businesses.

Committed Staff

As one teacher said, the essence of education is what goes on between student and teacher. Many of these schools have exceptional staffs described as "top notch," "extremely dedicated and committed," "very caring about children," "current and up-to-date on the latest research and methodology," and "accessible." Teachers were noted for putting in extra hours and going to bat for children and families.

These schools generally experience very low staff turnover. Some even had waiting lists for staff vacancies. Teachers often cited a positive working relationship with their colleagues as one of the reasons they are satisfied with their jobs.

A number of ideas for new approaches in these schools came from the staff (and sometimes from parents or students as well). Due to the collaborative nature of these schools, not only were these ideas implemented, but encouraged. Most of these schools also seem to share a common vision or mission and are moving in generally agreed-upon directions.

Professional development also appears to be a priority. (Whiteaker is a specific example). Several schools cited teachers who had won awards, or

who were doing national consulting, or who had implemented innovative ideas that became models for others.

Innovative Curriculum

A number of those interviewed talked about educating students to be "world citizens" through researching and developing skills that students will need for the future. These schools are taking a more global approach to education. In some schools, multicultural education and tolerance for differences are emphasized. In others, there are more foreign language classes offered or an immersion school program has been implemented.

Cooperative and interdisciplinary learning is replacing competitive, nonrelated curriculum in most of the schools. Administrators and teachers stressed the need for citizens who know how to work together as a team and who can see relationships between ideas and situations. In response to this need, these schools are using methodology that emphasizes peer teaching, small groups, evaluation as a group, and thematic or combined subject matter learning.

Technology is also used to enhance curriculum. Several schools use computer labs to teach math and reading. McKenzie High School uses distance learning to add to their curriculum offerings, which counteracts the disadvantage of isolation for a small rural school.

Work/study and community volunteer programs often provide "hands on" training to middle and high school students, enhancing their exposure to, and preparing them for, the world of work.

Most of these schools are experimenting with ways to fit the curriculum to the individual. There is an emphasis on individual learning styles, developmentally appropriate practices, and individual pacing. Some schools are cross-graded or have split classrooms or multiage grouping, which allows more flexibility in accurately placing students and also gives students a chance to advance at their own rate. An added benefit of nongraded systems may be stability and increased bonding between student and teacher. Some schools have organized their approaches so that students stay with the same teacher for more than one year.

Educating the 'Whole Child'

Most of these schools emphasize emotional and social development as much as cognitive achievement. Students are recognized and rewarded for good behavior as well as academic achievement. Students learn, in programs stressing social behavior, to be cooperative, respectful, and tolerant.

Extracurricular activities play an important part in these schools. These extra offerings, in addition to the core subjects, are a way to enrich children's education and teach young people to be lifelong learners. The activities provide a way for at-risk children to "catch up" or provide an enticement to keep borderline students in school.

Other aspects of the "whole child" approach may include integration or redefinition of core skills. "Writing across the curriculum" at Calapooia is just one example of how an academic subject is stressed more intensively than in the past, but in a wider, more collaborative fashion.

The New 'Discipline'

Positive recognition and a focus on building self-esteem has replaced the old punitive forms of discipline. This can be seen most clearly in the two middle schools, with their array of positive recognition programs.

Building self-esteem was most often mentioned as a particularly important goal, especially for middle school students. When students believe they can achieve, they will. These schools have high expectations of their students. When community and parental expectations interact in a positive way, student self-esteem is enhanced, and students who feel good about themselves take pride in their school and work.

Evaluation

Some of these schools are looking at new ways to assess students. Portfolios were most often mentioned, both by elementary and high schools. Teachers are looking for ways to evaluate learning other than through standardized test scores.

Sharon Dawson, a kindergarten teacher at Boise-Eliot, believes a conflict exists between the emphasis that her school district places on developmentally appropriate practices and the standardized tests that the children are asked to take. Also, she doesn't feel that standardized tests are an accurate way to evaluate what a child has learned:

> I like to see what a kid has learned from the beginning of the year to the end. And I think you can show that in ways other than standardized tests, that those tests are culturally biased at times, that they allow for no divergent thinking. I really don't think they can assess what kids know and what they don't know. I'm very distressed at the fact that our achievement—and my effectiveness as a teacher—are tied to how kids do on a test, because I think there are so many factors there that we, as teachers, cannot control.

North Eugene High School is also struggling with this issue as the staff attempts to come up with performance standards for moving students through their three curriculum levels.

Overcoming the Disadvantages of Size

The small rural high schools generally have small classes, which makes it easier to keep track of students who might otherwise be overlooked.

The larger urban schools also have made monitoring students a priority. These schools have compensated for their larger size by implementing programs or using techniques that ensure, as one middle school teacher said, that things don't just happen *to* kids, that everything is followed up, whether it be positive or negative. Most schools emphasize attendance. Frequent progress reports are issued to parents; teachers meet often as teams to talk about cases and try to provide more structure to ensure that youth don't fall through the cracks.

Larger schools also are helping kids feel the "personal touch" of a smaller school by instituting "schools within schools," such as the tribe and house programs at Calapooia and North Eugene. These kinds of programs help students maintain contact with the same teachers and classmates as well as help them identify with a smaller group within the school. These schools seem to be doing all they can to keep students in school and on track by finding ways to pay closer attention to each individual.

Programs for At-Risk Youth

Tied in with the emphasis on individual attention are the special programs these schools have established for disadvantaged children, such as at-risk camps, alternative schools, at-risk work/study programs, academic assistance, and staff or mentor tutors.

Schools that are experiencing high turnover or an influx of minorities are taking special measures to meet the needs of these students. Monroe, for example, is concentrating on multicultural programs and initiating surveys to determine if, and how, students feel discriminated against. Whiteaker, for example, has found a unique way to make new students feel welcome.

The high schools work on dropout prevention through at-risk programs that involve both individual and team efforts. All four high schools have low dropout rates, and, for at least two of them, this has been a real change from previous years.

Many of these schools pay extra attention to "transition" times for students. For instance, Monroe staff contact every fifth grader just prior to their entry into middle school.

North Eugene has found that freshman, or students who enter high school for the first time, need special attention. Their Freshman House program is designed with this in mind. All the high schools are focusing on the transition out of high school, with approaches that generally involve partnerships with businesses and communities.

At least one of the high schools has a career center that helps prepare students for post-high school plans and matches them with appropriate colleges. Three of the high schools have a high percentage of students going on to college (with a dramatic increase at North). McKenzie is an exception, but only because many students can't afford to go to college, a situation the principal hopes to remedy with a scholarship fund. Staff at Sherman and North help students to obtain scholarships from colleges or provide them with a share of money raised by the community.

Social Services

Both Ashland and North Eugene High Schools have school-based health clinics; the middle schools run counseling groups and other at-risk programs; Boise-Eliot provides free childcare; and Whiteaker has acted as an advocate for families in regard to the full spectrum of social services.

Whiteaker provides a model for other schools through the recent establishment of a regional nonprofit agency that deals directly with families' needs and frees school staff for more teaching time.

Conclusion

There are schools in Oregon and across the nation that are in trouble and not working well. But as the eight stories told in these pages make clear, some schools are doing many things right and seemingly better than ever. No one claims these schools don't need to improve. All administrators and staff who were interviewed pointed out that their schools were not perfect and emphasized their continuing search for more effective ways to educate children.

"I think schools have been doing a fairly good job all along," concluded Gary Craven, teacher at North Eugene High School. "The difficulty is that schools today have populations with greater needs and a lot more kids with problems. Clearly there's no way we can meet all those needs. But I've been teaching twenty-five years and I know we are doing a

much better job of trying to meet those needs. We're working harder at it, devoting more time, energy, and effort to it than we ever did when I first started teaching."

The continuing search for excellence—in which educators adapt to the changing needs of their students—is what these eight schools are all about.

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